

THE USE OF FILM AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE:
BRITISH NEWSREELS AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT

The first chapter discusses the value of cinematograph film as a primary source and examines the ways in which it has come to be regarded as such by commentators and historians alike. It concludes that the cinema newsreels have been singled out for particular attention because their "actuality" films were thought to approximate most closely to the "reality" of everyday events and happenings. In the early days of the cinema it was this supposed "fidelity" which apparently recommended the newsreel to the historian as a source for study. In more recent years, however, historians have come to realise that the newsreel displayed the same characteristics as cinematograph film in general and that therefore, by nature, it was open to selection and manipulation. Now it is felt that the newsreel offers a primary source of historical evidence in two ways: first of all as the bearer of a certain amount of basic information which it would be difficult to impart by any other means; and secondly, as the bearer of the messages which would have been imparted in their day on whatever matter of public interest that was under review.

The second chapter traces the evolution of the cinema newsreel in order to investigate its "internal" nature. It ascertains that by 1936 there were five newsreel companies which held a virtual monopoly over the

newsreel industry in this country. These five companies were to dominate the newsreel industry until the demise of the newsreel itself, by virtue of their control over the production, distribution and exhibition sides to the industry. The chapter also examines the methods of production, the nature of the technology, the organisational structure of the newsreel companies, and the personnel in charge of both management and production. It concludes that selection and manipulation were inherent factors in the production of the newsreels and in the nature of the newsreel organisations.

The third chapter looks outside the newsreels to see where they were exhibited and what the reaction was to them from the cinema audiences. It establishes the fact that the newsreels must have constituted a part of every cinema programme. The predominantly working class audience seems to have regarded the newsreels favourably except during the period of World War II. Despite the many opinions to the contrary, the newsreels cannot justifiably be accused of being petty and parochial in content. Although the newsreels were officially exempt from censorship there can be no doubt that both public and governmental pressures were exerted upon them, sometimes successfully, to change certain stories.

Chapter Four attempts to compare the newsreels with the other news-bearing media of the day and to place them

in the general structure of British society. It concludes that though they did not do as full a job as the British press in covering the news, they still cannot be devalued or under-estimated in comparison with the rest of the media. The media generally seem to have been beset by the same problems in their selection and construction of the news. Internal and external influences were characteristics of all the media. The projection of Britain and the outside world which the newsreels presented was little different from that portrayed by the other media.

The final four chapters go on to look at a case study of the British newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War. It establishes several points. First of all the newsreels stressed the horrific nature of war in general. Secondly they emphasised the particular nature of the Civil War in Spain and contrasted this factor with the picture of a Britain at peace. Their message was that Britain should steer clear of any European altercation which might potentially lead to war. However their message did change slowly. Eventually they came round to the opinion that Britain should re-arm in the light of the worsening European situation. In the meantime their coverage of the War in Spain manifested many propagandistic tendencies. In the final analysis the British newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War was limited and partial.

ABBREVIATIONS

BMN	British Movietone News
BP	British Paramount News
GB	Gaumont British News
GG	Gaumont Graphic
PG	Pathé Gazette
Universal	Universal News

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Introduction

The Spanish Civil War broke out on July 17, 1936, with the rising of the garrison at Melilla in Morocco and by July 18 the military rising had spread to the mainland of Spain. From that point until the war officially came to an end on April 1, 1939, the Spanish people were locked in a struggle to determine who was to govern Spain. But during that time the Spanish Civil War also influenced the thoughts and actions of people generally in many countries beyond the frontiers of Spain.

In attempting to assess the impact which the Spanish Civil War had upon foreign opinion historians have quite naturally looked towards the archives of the various European newspapers which were in print at the time. For instance, David Wingeate Pike chose to examine the French press as part of his analysis of French public opinion during the period of the Spanish Civil War.¹ Similarly Kenneth Watkins delved into the reaction emanating from the British press in his study into the effect of the Spanish Civil War upon British political opinion.² To some extent Franklin Reid Gannon also touched upon the British press response to Spain as part of his larger investigation into the British attitude towards Germany in the years from

1. David Wingeate Pike, Conjecture, Propaganda and Deceit and the Spanish Civil War, Stanford, California, 1968.

2. K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided, London 1963

1936 to 1939.³

But what is perhaps most disturbing about these three books is the willingness on the part of their respective authors to see the press reaction during this period as providing the only major source for a study on the dissemination of news about the Spanish Civil War. To be fair, it should be added that two of these authors do acknowledge their limitations, which they ascribe to a lack of extant sources. Pike, for example, comments of the French situation:

In the absence of opinion polls and even of influential radio commentary, almost the only source of that public opinion and news dissemination is the French press.⁴

Gannon implies the same with regard to the British situation:

In those days just witnessing the development of radio as a news media, and before television, the newspaper press was the only means of information about the outside world for the vast majority of people.⁵

However both men have completely failed to take into account the existence of another far-reaching and influential medium of news transmission, the cinema newsreel, which was on view in most of the countries of Europe throughout the period from 1930 onwards. It is easy enough to produce statistics, as does Gannon, which reveal that in 1934 every 100 families in Britain bought 95 morning and 57½ evening newspapers every day, and 130 Sunday newspapers

3. Franklin Reid Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-1939, London 1971.

4. Pike, Conjecture, Propaganda and Deceit, p.xv.

5. Gannon, The British Press and Germany, p.1.

every week, or that in 1937 the British press was producing a total of 1,577 newspapers and 3,119 magazines and periodicals. It is equally as easy to cite figures which show that in Britain there were by 1934 some 4,300 cinemas providing 4 million seats and showing newsreels to an average weekly audience of $18\frac{1}{2}$ million paid admissions, an audience which by 1940 had risen to a weekly average of 21 million.

But arguments about such points of comparison are fruitless, other than perhaps to suggest that the cinema newsreel is one area of historical study which cannot be so easily ignored. After all in any study of the newspaper press or the cinema newsreel the problems are basically the same. In both instances it is a comparatively light task to prove that these media reached a large audience, but it is yet another thing to prove that the media, in whatever form, necessarily did communicate themselves to the mass of people receiving them. It cannot be stressed often enough that there is a great deal of conjecture on whether the messages transmitted by the media over such events as the Spanish Civil War did come across to the audience which was presented with them. Indeed conjecture should be the watchword of any study into the mass media or mass communication. That is perhaps one reason why Asa Briggs has been prompted to suggest:

To talk of "mass communications" is to mislead: the agencies of so-called "mass communication" are really agencies of mass or multiple transmission.⁶

6. Asa Briggs, Mass Entertainment: The Origins of a Modern Industry, Adelaide 1960, p.29.

Care, then, should be taken to remember that one is constantly speculating on whether the messages transmitted by the media did communicate themselves to an audience. Furthermore care should be taken to remember that, while it is possible to isolate and identify the messages emanating from the media, conjecture and speculation are once again the inspiration for any ideas which one might have with regard to the motives of the people who formed these messages. For as David Pike has put it:

Conjecture, therefore, is the primary interest, and above all, conjecture on what can never be proven, on what in fact historians largely ignore: the motivations of the actors on the stage, the inner thoughts they never expressed or dared to express in written form, and the considerations which moved them to action or held them to inaction as they sprang from hope or fear.⁷

This study, therefore, attempts to investigate how the British newsreels covered the Spanish Civil War, what messages were transmitted by them on Spain, and what the motives were of the men in charge of the newsreels when forming these messages. To this end the study has examined the newsreel coverage of two companies, Gaumont British News and British Paramount News, throughout the duration of the Spanish Civil War. In both instances all the stories relating to Spain for this period have been viewed. Most of them had spoken commentaries. In the case of Gaumont written commentaries for all the stories have also been

7. Pike, Conjecture, Propaganda and Deceit, p.xv.

examined. In the case of Paramount very few written commentaries were available but where they were they have been examined along with the shot lists for all the stories. A cursory investigation was made of the same companies' stories relating to Spain for the period before the Spanish Civil War, as well as the Universal News, the Pathé Gazette and the British Movietone News for the period both before and during the war. All the material was viewed from Summer 1970 to Easter 1972 during the research and production of a compilation film on The Spanish Civil War, which was the contribution made by the University of Edinburgh to the Inter-University History Film Consortium. This film comprised No.3 in the series of British Universities Historical Studies in Film.

This study has two further aims. First of all it attempts to fill in the background to the debate among historians about the value of archive film as a historical source. The purpose there is to assess the usefulness of film as a primary source for historical study. Secondly, it attempts to investigate the emergence of the British newsreel during the 1930s as a means of mass communication and as a disseminator of the news. It will be seen that only after both these tasks have been accomplished can it be possible to speculate about the newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter 1

Film as a Primary Source

This study has concentrated upon the film coverage of the Spanish Civil War made by two of the newsreel companies which were in operation in Britain during the period from 1936 to 1939. The purpose has been to try and determine what value such newsreel material might have for the contemporary historian. Yet the approach to this archive film has to a great extent been governed by the attitude which historians, both past and present, have held with regard to cinematograph film in general and to newsreel film in particular.

In 1955 the German historian, Fritz Terveen, first wrote:

Ever since the invention of cinematography the question has been raised again and again whether and to what extent it would be possible to use film as a way of documenting contemporary history.¹

It is the intention of this opening chapter to take up Professor Terveen's point and to trace in what ways film has been regarded as a means of documenting history. For only then will it be possible to ascertain at what point in time historians became interested, for their own part, in using film as a potential source of historical study. Of course the advent of films and the cinema is a comparatively recent technological phenomenon, but despite that

1. Fritz Terveen, "Film as a Historical Document", (translated by C.L. Burgauner), in Film and the Historian, London 1969, p.22.

fact the numerous views on film and its possible value as an additional record of documentation have changed almost as often as the technical advances made within the film industry itself.

William Friese-Greene is generally regarded, whether rightly or wrongly, as the father of cinematography. For in 1889 he applied for a patent on a film camera containing at least some of the elements necessary for "photography by successive poses". It is only to be expected that an inventor would test out his theories on subjects which proved to be most accessible for his schemes, so in the same year Friese-Greene shot moving pictures of Londoners wandering through Hyde Park. His film provided some of the earliest examples of "actuality" film, "short scenes of everyday people and events, unmanipulated activity of more or less general interest".² But not until some six years later did the cinema as such come into existence when in 1895 two French brothers, Louis and Auguste Lumière, showed an audience in the basement of a cafe on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, a programme of short moving pictures which they had made in previous months. The fruits of their "Cinématographe" also took the form of actuality material with titles like "Arrival of a train at a station", "A Blacksmith" and "Bathing Beach".

The first claim that this actuality film might be of more use than simply for entertainment purposes was made

2. Raymond Fielding, The American Newsreel 1911-1967, Norman, Oklahoma, 1972, p.4.

by W.K.L. Dickson, who had worked with Thomas Edison on the perforation and standardisation of film. He suggested in 1895:

The advantages to students and historians will be immeasurable. Instead of the dry and misleading accounts, tinged with the exaggerations of the chroniclers' minds, our archives will be enriched by the vitalised pictures of great national scenes, instinct with all the glowing personalities which characterised them.

What is the future of the kinetograph? Ask rather, from what conceivable phase of the future it can be debarred. In the promotion of business interests, in the advancement of science, in the revelation of unguessed worlds, in its educational and re-creative powers, and in its ability to immortalise our fleeting but beloved associations, the kinetograph stands foremost among the creations of modern inventive genius.³

Dickson was thoroughly optimistic about the prospects for the future. Similarly three years later on March 25, 1898, a Polishman, Boleslaw Matuszewski, advertising his new motion picture enterprise in Paris, boldly declared the cinema to be "une nouvelle source de l'histoire". Whilst it is evident that his general statements were meant to enhance the business potential of his own cinematic endeavours, Matuszewski did at least show great foresight in suggesting the establishment of an archive of actuality films for the use of historians. Furthermore he went one step further than Dickson in pointing out certain limitations to film as he stated:

3. W.K.L. Dickson and Antonia Dickson, History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kinetophonograph, New York 1895, pp.51-52.

One difficulty gives us pause: that a historical event does not always happen where there is someone waiting for it. Our usual history is composed of ceremonies arranged in advance and posed before the lens. It is the beginnings of actions, initial movements and unexpected events that are concealed from the camera, no less than they are hidden from other media of communication.

However, like Dickson, Matuszewski considered that this limitation would be overcome simply as a result of the fact that:

Cinema photography is professionally indiscreet; watchful for all opportunities, its instinct will direct it to where events are taking place that will grow into history. Rather than deplore its excess of zeal we should regret any over-timidity...A people's movement or a street riot does not frighten it and even in a war one can easily imagine its apparatus being carried on the same shoulders that bear rifles.

In isolating the physical mobility of the motion picture camera yet at the same time hinting at the inability of the cameraman to determine what events may or may not be of paramount importance to cover, Matuszewski put his finger upon what would prove to be one of the greatest problems to confront the actuality film-makers, and one that would come to play an even larger role in the life of the newsreel cameraman. When concentrating his thoughts and words upon the practical side of cinematography Matuszewski displayed some useful insights. But when he tried to step into the shoes of the historian he tended to become too lyrical by far about the potential value of film and the vistas which would open up, as is evident from his

statement that:

The cinema may not give a complete history, but what it gives is incontestably and absolutely true. Ordinary photographs can be retouched to the point of transformation. But just try to retouch, in a uniform way for each figure, those thousands of almost microscopic negatives.⁴

It is noticeable that this last emphasis on "cinematographic truth" is what distinguishes the writings of both Matuszewski and, before him, W.K.L. Dickson. With understandable naivety and undaunted optimism, they both welcomed the advent of motion pictures, and their own enterprises which went with them, as heralding the arrival of a pictorially reproductive art which they believed was synonymous with the events it deigned to recreate. Here was a process, as they saw it, that could honestly and faithfully hold a mirror up to nature and come away with a pure reflection, untainted by the interposition of the artist's hand. It is easy now in retrospect to conclude, as does Fritz Terveen:

This demand was in fact made only by those who were connected with the development of cinematography without having detailed knowledge of the historian's needs. They were impressed by the fact that it was possible to preserve present day life faithfully in moving pictures. It was thought that would be of particular interest to the historians.⁵

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4. Boleslaw Matuszewski, "Une nouvelle source de l'histoire", as translated in Jay Leyda, Films beget Films, London 1964, p.15.
 5. Terveen, "Film as a Historical Document", p.22.

It was inevitable that the founding fathers of cinematography would have over-stepped their limits and that they would, as they did, enthuse to one and all about the potential value of their respective inventions. The cinema industry has always had a hard-sell, exploitative side to its nature which was obviously meant to enhance its own interests. Yet even in their own day events were to catch up with the first cinematographers' claims for "visual truth and sincerity". Such events were to prove that the manipulation of film would more than likely win the day, whether at the command of commercial or ideological pressures.

In the very same year that Matuszewski was speaking in Paris, for instance, Francois Doublier was touring Russia exhibiting numerous pieces of actuality film that had been shot by the Lumière brothers. From the material he had with him Doublier put together a scene of a French army parade, street-scenes in Paris, film of a Finnish tug going out to meet a barge and shots of the Delta of the Nile. "In this sequence, with a little help from the commentator, and with a great deal of help from the audience's imagination, these scenes told the following story: Dreyfus before his arrest, the Palais de Justice where Dreyfus was court-martialled, Dreyfus being taken to a battleship, and Devil's Island, where he was imprisoned, all supposedly taking place in 1894."⁶ As Doublier sardonically recounts, "People actually believed that this was a filming of the famous case."⁷

6. Leyda, Films beget Films, p.13.

7. Fielding, The American Newsreel, p.8.

Faking was at hand and money was to be made. Furthermore during the period from 1896 to 1910 the French film producer George Méliès concocted a whole series of theatrical recreations of the more important events of the day. They capitalised entirely upon the public's belief in the veracity of actuality material.

The events of newsworthy importance which he reproduced in his film studios included the assassination of President McKinley, the sinking of the Maine, the coronation of Edward VII and, once again, the trial of Alfred Dreyfus. Trick photography was in fact Méliès' stock-in-trade and his initiative was to destroy Matuszewski's adage that it would be impossible to retouch "those thousands of almost microscopic negatives". For Méliès' studios employed girls to tint film by hand, frame by frame. Of course he was looking to introduce colour into his films, not so much to alter their provenance or distort their faithfulness, but in the process his studios more than any others revealed the immense potential for manipulation of the cinematographic image.

Throughout this early period in the history of the cinema, the historical profession paid little attention to the cries of the cinematographers for vindication of their films as a potential source of historical documentation. In the light of the immediate capture of the film industry by those members in its ranks who had more of an interest in its business potential, it is easy to understand the absence of a response. It was not until the 1920s that

historians felt committed to make any comment and in the meantime the First World War had shown how film could be developed and put to further use, this time as an instrument of political propaganda.⁸

Between the years 1926 and 1934 at the several meetings of the International Congress of the Historical Sciences, a few historians began to take an interest for their own part in film as a type of historical documentation. At one of their congresses they even went so far as to establish an International Iconographical Commission, with the expressed intention of dealing with the problems of collecting and sorting out film material for historical purposes. The papers of such historians as Lhéritier, Fruin and Glotz, among others, were published intermittently in their Committee's bulletin.⁹ First and foremost, these men were interested in the practical task of setting up the right conditions for the preservation of film, through the establishment of film archives, and then they set about the problem of deciding what films should be preserved. Towards this end Fruin undertook a mammoth enquiry throughout many countries, including Germany, France, Belgium, Canada and

8. Armand Rio, "The Battle of the Films", World's Work, August 1916, pp.236-240.

9. See M. Lhéritier, "Rapport présenté sur les rapports de l'histoire avec le cinématographe", Bulletin of the International Committee of the Historical Sciences, Vol. II, 1929-1930, pp.361-364; M. Fruin "Memoire sur les Films documentaires", ibid., pp.454-456; Max Fauconnier, "Les Archives Cinématographiques", ibid., Vol. III, 1931, pp.45-49; M. Fruin, "Enquete de la commission internationale sur les films historiques", ibid., Vol. IV, 1932, pp.467-474.

Great Britain, in order to find out what archives were already in existence, how they were kept, whether they comprised "historical" films, and under what conditions films were deposited in them. His use of the term "historical" films was in no way begging the question, "What constitutes a historical film?", since the Iconographical Commission had also gone some way towards a definition of that term. Very early on in their proceedings the Commission had determined that what the cinema industry called historical films would not serve as a possible source of material for the historian since they were open to so much dramatic licence on the part of their creators. Thus feature films, generally along the lines of epics like "Ben Hur" starring Ramon Navarro, were considered to provide very little scope for the historian.

As far as the Iconographical Commission was concerned the term historical film could only justifiably be used of those films "which record a person or period from the time after the invention of cinematography and without dramatic or artistic purposes: those films which present a visual record of a definite event, person or locality, and which presuppose a clearly recognisable historical interest inherent in the subject matter."¹⁰ From such a definition it becomes evident that what interested these historians were not feature films, filmed reconstructions or even many documentaries, but more the actuality films of their day, or as they were called by that time, the topicals, later

10. As translated in Terveen, "Film as a Historical Document", p.24.

to become known as the newsreels. The Commission clearly saw that films were of most value to the historian as "illusions of objective reality, of events and people, a visual version of newspapers."¹¹ Once again, however, it is obvious that the stress lay very heavily upon the idea of cinematographic truth. The prevalent belief among these men was that by excluding from consideration the feature films, and by concentrating upon the actuality material, one thereby somehow excluded the interference which might ensue from any personal interpolation by the film-makers.

In Britain it took many years before the professional historian began to investigate or associate himself with the realm of film, perhaps because of a lack of a strong film culture in this country, perhaps also because the commercial side of Britain's film industry tried for so long to push forward their feature film products for the historian's consideration. Such interest as there was manifested itself in discussions on the historical accuracy of films like "The Private Life of Henry VIII" and "Catherine the Great", amounting to no more than condemnations of these distorted versions of history, and offering nothing further in the way of constructive suggestions towards the value of film as a historical source.¹² The emergence during the 1930s

11. H.R. Kedward, "Politics, Iconography and Film", The Brighton Film Review, No.18, March 1970, p.23.

12. See W.T. Waugh, "History in Moving Pictures", History, Vol. II, January 1927, p.324; H. Forsyth Hardy, "Fact or Fiction?", Cinema Quarterly, No.2, Spring 1934, pp.179-181; "List of Historical-Biographical Films, 1912-1936", World Film News, Vol. I, No.12, March 1937, pp.10-11; F. Wilkinson, "Can History be taught by film?", Sight and Sound, Vol. 2, 1936, p.91.

of a strong documentary movement, offering an alternative and respectable form of cinema for the disenchanted intelligentsia, only served to divert what little interest there was even further afield.

Much the same story can be told of the response in America, where the first serious thoughts on the value of film as a historical source emanated from an archivist. In 1948, John Bradley, the motion picture consultant to the Library of Congress, reiterated from his own findings what the Iconographical Commission had revealed earlier, when he said:

Again, in motion pictures, we find a new and flexible medium for recording the history of people, things and events so that they attain a realism never attained before. The ancients documented their history on tablets of stone, others in monuments, paintings and folk tales, and more recently, the printing press has served this basic urge to be remembered whether as individuals or nations. Now we record in motion and sound on film.

Such documentation or recording has a fidelity not found in any other medium. For example, the printed word is an artificial thing and its use is based on an acquired art. Motion pictures transcend these limitations. History so recorded will not only have a new fidelity but a present tense value not found in other mediums.¹³

In view of the massive amounts of film expanded by American, British and German governmental agencies during the Second

13. John G. Bradley, "Motion picture activities of the Library of Congress" as quoted in John B. Kuiper, "The historical value of motion pictures", American Archivist, Vol. 31, No.4, October 1968, pp.385-386.

World War on propaganda, Bradley's insistence that film is not an artificial thing, and is invested with "fidelity", seems surprisingly simple and shortsighted. Furthermore his implication that the production of film is not "based on an acquired art" reveals a sad misunderstanding of the methods of film-making. Indeed his complete lack of knowledge on the nature of film and the methods of film production show that he had not advanced one jot beyond the pioneering efforts made some twenty years earlier by historians in Europe, with regard to the value of film as a historical source.

It took a film-maker of the calibre of Sir Arthur Elton to understand both these facets of film and to appreciate that "films can be used, as other historical source material can be used, for various and different historical purposes." For it was Elton who noted that film should be considered as source material for historical studies "in the sense that palimpsest and parchment, hieroglyph and rune, clay tablet and manorial role are source materials, fragments, sometimes fragments of fragments, often defaced by time, and applied to purposes of historical reconstruction rarely contemplated by the original authors."

Elton's destruction of the maxim that film provides an illusion of objective reality is exhaustive and complete. For in the same paper entitled "The film as source material for history"¹⁴ Sir Arthur Elton laments the fact that there

14. Sir Arthur Elton, "The film as source material for history", Aslib Proceedings, Vol. 7, 1955, pp.207-216.

is "no film Times, no New Statesman or Spectator and, virtually, not even a Daily Express." Taking up the point that film is an illusion of external reality, of objective reality, Elton goes on to state:

For at least the first thirty years the content of the newsreels was determined mainly by the passing fads and fancies of the time...Of scenes of one-legged men pushing turnips with their noses from Paris to Rome there is much; of boat races, crowned heads, bathing belles, railway smashes, the glossier phases of war, fashion parades, fires, murders and dance marathons, more; but of industry, technology, sociology, art, poetry, agriculture, only accidental glimpses. There are miles of men biting dogs, but much less of the stuff of history, dogs biting men...Taking a parallel from written sources, it is as if the historian of the early twentieth century had little more to guide him than the Daily Mirror, Old Moore's Almanac, Tit-Bits and a run of Nelson's Sevenpenny Novels.

Sir Arthur Elton's first-hand experience of film production and the medium of film led him quite naturally to a mistrust of the truthfulness of film as a visual record, for as he put it, "Let one piece of film be joined to another and something new comes into existence, some quality shared by neither piece alone." Furthermore a film producer of his stature and discrimination could not fail to appreciate that film is not an objective, faithful, reproduction untouched by human hand, but that selection and manipulation are inevitable in the process of film production. He concluded that it was in the nature of film to be manipulated and that it was in the nature of film production to do the manipulating. However he had also introduced a new argument into

the proceedings, for he had shown how selection and manipulation played as strong a part in the realm of actuality and factual film, as it did in the realm of the feature film. Yet for all that he was by no means willing to write off entirely the value of actuality film at the purely depictive level.

It was Christopher Roads who collated the findings on the value of such film at the simple, depictive level of photographic reality, during the course of a paper he delivered on December 2, 1965.¹⁵ Dr. Roads began by isolating what he considered to be five significant classes of film, each of which held varying degrees of interest for the historian. The first such class he pinpointed was the original record in a completely unedited condition, once it had been removed from the film camera and exposed, with all its attendant technical failures and excess footage. The second class consisted of the same film in a semi-edited condition with all its excess footage and technically inadequate sequences excised. Thirdly there is what Dr. Roads called edited record film in which category he included newsreels. The drawback as he saw it to this material was that it had generally undergone "censorship" of one sort or another, and on the whole reflected contemporary attitudes and prejudices. Whilst admitting that "It can, of course, in this sense gain in its value as historical evidence" he considered it had for the most part "sacrificed

15. Christopher H. Roads, "Film as historical evidence", Journal of the Society of Archivists, Vol. III, 1965-1969, pp.183-191.

much in status as a basic record". The fourth category of film was the documentary whose purpose was to tell a story and which culled film of varied provenance from many sources to put across this story to the viewer. Once again the failure was that "In this new purpose the original context is lost and, unless the film is dismembered professionally, there is rarely much chance of using such film as direct historical evidence". Finally there is the vast field of the feature film which Dr. Roads dismisses as offering little more than "a distorted perspective". He does willingly concede that they must be considered as "important historical evidence of the attitudes to certain problems of the generation that created them", but once again he concludes, "in that they are completely re-enacted, in no sense evidence of the separate events they pretend to depict".

The arguments put forward by Christopher Roads suggest that his personal preference was for the first two classes of film. He does to some extent weigh Elton's arguments about the nature of film and film production largely militating against a capacity for "true reflection", in his analysis. This is evident from his remarks regarding newsreels and feature films, where in both instances he concedes that the purpose for which such films are used can reveal a great deal about the attitudes of the people making them and the period within which they were produced. But in the final event Dr. Roads firmly believes that film is of most value as a basic record. And he goes on to cite several important ways in which, when once such film

has been thoroughly authenticated, it can "not only record invaluable but uniquely innumerable aspects of the social economic, administrative, military and political history of this century". These ways might be summarised as follows:

(a) Film can depict the attitudes of the people shown towards the events being depicted.

(b) Film can describe the physical conditions and geography of people and places.

(c) Film can record the measurement and effectiveness of machinery or act as a record of experiments in the development of technology.

(d) Film can effectively show the personality of political leaders.

Within their respective papers, Sir Arthur Elton and Dr. Christopher Roads had adequately rehearsed the arguments and probed the issues that were to occupy both commentators and historians alike in subsequent years, when it came to debating the value of film as a historical source. It will be seen that to a great extent these debates, particularly among historians, revolve around a choice of emphasis between Elton's views, on the nature of film and the selection and manipulation inherent in the process of film production, and Roads' view that "It is true that the film which survives may be biased, even to the extent of deliberate misrepresentation, but where it does show aspects, such as human conduct and behaviour, technical equipment and topographical features, it adds substantially to the historian's understanding."

It is noticeable, for instance, that the film critic Penelope Houston, in an article she wrote entitled "The nature of the evidence",¹⁶ simply elaborates upon many of the features which Elton had earlier outlined in pinpointing some of the shortcomings of the film image. Her article comments upon the areas where film ostensibly appears to give us little in the way of answers when she notes:

Cameramen have provided us with a shorthand visual imagery for this century: a British political crisis means a crowd in the rain outside Number 10; the Depression means cloth-capped men on street corners; the General Strike, a shot of idle machinery or empty railway lines; the Battle of Britain, that shot from "Fires were started" of fire-hoses snaking away down a London street after a raid. But look behind the shots and the film image can't help you. What political crisis? How many men out of work? Which air-raid, and which street?

Miss Houston's observation are of course correct. So much of what interests the historian is not on film. The cameras were never allowed behind the closed doors where political decisions were made. Her conclusion that this makes film "untrustworthy, superficial, vulnerable to every kind of distortion" is well justified. But her assertion that film is "at the same time irreplaceable, necessary, a source material that no twentieth century historian ought to disregard, though many may still seem prepared to do so", remains unproven. She does, however, hint of one path which might be followed to vindicate her assertion when she

16. Penelope Houston, "The nature of the evidence", Sight and Sound, Vol. 36, 1967, p.92.

adds that "one thing, it seems to me, that historians are going to have to reckon with is the unfixed nature of the image, and its partisanship". For when, after 1968, historians in Britain did finally apply themselves to an examination of film as a historical source, this was the area of study which first captured their attention.

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham Professor John Grenville chose to examine the subject of Film as History¹⁷ in order to determine just what kind of evidence film put forward for consideration by the historian, and to establish whether it constituted a primary or a secondary source. In fact he came to the conclusion that film provides a primary source of evidence in two basic ways. To illustrate his point he used the example of a Gaumont British newsreel story on Neville Chamberlain's visit to Adolf Hitler and his return from the Berchtesgaden during the Munich Crisis in September, 1938. He noted that these film sequences "provide evidence of the manner in which Chamberlain read an important statement at Heston on the results of his visit" and that from them it is also possible "to form conclusions for instance from his general demeanour and from his reception by the German crowds in Berchtesgaden and in Downing Street". At this level film can be seen to impart certain basic "information", as Professor Grenville puts it, very much along the lines which Dr. Christopher Roads had earlier

17. J.A.S. Grenville, Film as History, Birmingham 1971, pp.7-9.

mapped out.

But Professor Grenville also proposes that this newsreel imparts further and more useful primary evidence if the question is asked of the material: "What were the British public told at the time and how was the Munich crisis presented to them?" For then one is looking at the archive film in order to determine what "messages" were being put across to the British public by this very important medium of communication. In conclusion Professor Grenville adds that the historian's task would then be "to consider this new evidence in relation to that already existing so that the new evidence can be made the basis of a point of view not possible without it." The final point, that film only provides an additional source of evidence at the disposal of the historian, and is not in any way to replace but simply to augment the traditional sources for consideration is a point heavily emphasised.

The distinction between the information and the message which a piece of film might contain is a simple but successful one and draws together the different ideas on film as evidence that had been previously put forward by Elton and Roads. On the one hand film offers primary evidence because of the amount of basic information it displays at the purely depictive level, and on the other hand film manifests general and particular messages on matters of public interest. But Professor Grenville obviously considers that the latter role is by far the most important for he states "It is in the study of attempts to mould public opinion on political,

social and international questions that research in film (and later television) will find its first important academic application".

In a paper he wrote entitled "Archive Film as Source Material",¹⁸ Professor Arthur Marwick draws a different conclusion. Both historians are primarily interested in newsreel film as a source for the historian but the difference between their respective views is simply one of emphasis. Professor Marwick also makes a distinction similar to that of Professor Grenville's between information and message. Only for Professor Marwick the message that such a film wishes to put forward is described as "the witting testimony". The term he uses to describe the amount of information a film might contain is "the unwitting testimony".

Professor Marwick begins by admitting that film is an important source in the formation of social and political attitudes in the cinemagoing public. He acknowledges that in the newsreels "There is a clear message which the film-makers wish to put over, and a message, which, quite possibly, was absorbed by a wide viewing audience. The study of this witting testimony is the first use of archive film for the historian". However his own particular interest becomes most apparent when he states:

But all historians must be essentially interested in what I call "the unwitting testimony" of the sources. However much filtering has been done by the cameraman, however much reality has been distorted by cutting, editing, and many other devices, it is still possible for the historian to

18. A. Marwick, "Archive Film as Source Material", Archive Film Compilation Booklet, Milton Keynes 1973, pp.2-3.

deduce from the film evidence facts about past situations which indeed he might well find it hard to derive from any other source.

Like Christopher Roads before him, Arthur Marwick goes on to list the points he would include under his heading of unwitting testimony. These include:

1. The environment
2. Life-styles and patterns of behaviour.
3. Portraiture; film (though often in the early days politicians and others posed very artificially for this new-fangled device) frequently shows us more of the real character of past individuals than any other source can.
4. The "crash course" function of archive film. If we want to know immediately what some technological, or specialist, operation was really like (making artificial flowers in a sweat shop, for instance) film can more readily give us a "crash course" than any other possible type of source.
5. As a development of this, film is invaluable for giving us the concrete reality of particular situations (life in the trenches, for instance; or the unequal terms of combat between a mobile fighter-plane and a heavy bomber).

Once again it is heavily emphasised in Professor Marwick's writings that film should only be used as an adjunct to the historian's more traditional sources.

At the present moment in time then there are two schools of thought on the value of film as a historical source. Both agree in essence that film offers a primary source of evidence in two distinct ways. The only area of disagreement is a small one between the relative importance which should be ascribed to the amount of information

or unwitting testimony that a film might contain and the messages or witting testimony that a film manifests.

What is perhaps most interesting is that around these two schools of ideas two distinct bodies of film production have also grown up, each attempting to put its ideas in practice. For several years historians have acted as consultants to the professional world of film and television on such archive compilation series as B.B.C.'s "The Great War", Granada's "All Our Yesterday's" and Thames Television's "The World at War". But in more recent years historians have also decided to take the tools of film production into their own hands. In this country the result has been a stream of archive film compilations, drawing upon the resources of the former newsreel libraries, and emanating from two organisations in particular. The first such body, the Inter-University History Film Consortium, has so far produced four films.¹⁹ These films were produced by historians and were intended to act as a teaching aid for history students only. The second such body was the Open University where historians have used archive film on two

19. British Universities Historical Studies in Film, No.1, "The Munich Crisis", written and researched by John Grenville, directed by Nicholas Pronay, 1969; British Universities Historical Studies in Film No.2, "The End of Illusions", written and researched by John Grenville, directed by Nicholas Pronay, 1970; British Universities Historical Studies in Film No.3, "The Spanish Civil War", written, researched and narrated by Paul Addison and Owen Dudley Edwards, edited and directed by Tony Aldgate, 1972; British Universities Historical Studies in Film No.4, "The Winter War", written and researched by Derek Spring, edited by George Brandt, 1974.

courses, intended in the first instance for history students once again.²⁰

The difference in the two approaches to archive film compilation on historical topics has been distinguished by the fact that whereas the Consortium prefers to employ the traditional film techniques of selection and manipulation, for the purpose of constructing a continuous narrative, the Open University has attempted to reduce selection and manipulation to a minimum, in an attempt to produce a collection of film documents.

In both instances, however, it is noticeable that film is being used to provide primary evidence in two distinct ways; first of all as the bearer of a certain amount of basic information which it would be difficult to impart by any other means; and secondly, as the bearer of the messages which would have been imparted in their day on whatever matter of public interest that was under review.

20. The Open University: A301, "War and Society", academic editor for the series, Arthur Marwick, 1973; A401, "Great Britain, 1750-1950, Sources and Historiography", 1974.

Chapter 2

Inside the Newsreels

(a) Aims and Objectives

The interest shown by historians within Britain over the past few years in the use of film as a historical source has not only manifested itself in the realms of film production, but also in a series of seminars and conferences arranged by the British Universities Film Council, the Open University and the Imperial War Museum,¹ and the setting up of such bodies as the Slade Film History Register and the Film Committee of the Historical Association. At the research level the historian has shown an interest most of all in the actuality material housed in the various newsreel archives and the newsreel companies which produced them.² But the approach to this archival film has been marked by a healthy respect for the nature of film itself and for the nature of film production. No longer is it quite true to say:

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1. "Film and the Historian", British Universities Film Council, April 1968, University College, London; "Archive Film in the Study and Teaching of Twentieth Century History", B.U.F.C., the Open University and the Imperial War Museum, June 1972, I.W.M., London; "Film Propaganda and the Historian", History Film Consortium, I.W.M., Slade Film History Register, July 1973, I.W.M., London; "Film and the Second World War", I.W.M., September 1974, I.W.M., London; "The value of news film to the historian", B.U.F.C., December 1972, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor.
 2. Nicholas Pronay, "British Newsreels in the 1930s", Part I, "Audience and Producers", History, Vol. 56, October 1971, pp.411-418; Part II, "Their Policies and Impact", Vol. 57, December 1971, pp.63-72.

The fact that we have been slow to recognise and identify the methods of film distortion has delayed the development of suitable methodological approaches to the film medium.³

Nor is it any longer correct to suggest that:

Now, another difficult task challenges those historians converted to film. They must devise proper methodologies for their use of the film and conceptualise the relationships of film and history. Scant work has been done in either direction.⁴

For historians are increasingly aware when viewing newsreel material that what they are seeing is a fabricated, manipulated statement and that distortion plays a great part in the conjuring up of the newsreels' messages. Now it would be more to the point to suggest:

The essential and simple point to grasp then is that a piece of film is not some unadulterated reflection of historical truth captured by the camera.⁵

Furthermore the historian has attempted to conceptualise the relationship of film and history by attempting to understand first of all the nature of film and the nature of film production, in order then to find out what areas in

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3. Kuiper, "The historical value of motion pictures", p.389.
 4. E. Bradford Burns, "Conceptualising the use of film to study history; A biblio-filmography", Film and History, Vol. IV, No.4, December, 1974, p.1.
 5. Grenville, Film as History, p.9.

the production of the newsreels were open to manipulation. For only when one has a thorough grasp of this side of the process is it possible to begin to speculate about the nature of film and history, of what constituted the "news", and of what messages and images were put before the British cinemagoing public on matters such as current affairs.

This study attempts to look at the newsreel coverage of one particular event, the Spanish Civil War, through the eyes of two newsreel companies which were in operation during that period in European history. But before going on to discern what the British public were told at the time about this foreign affray, it was felt necessary to look at the nature of film, at the structure of the newsreel organisations themselves, and to examine the nature of the newsreel production process.

Film is first of all an art form, an art form peculiarly married with the world of mass entertainment, but an art form nonetheless.⁶ As an art form this means that all the biographical materials which are ordinarily useful in the study of the other arts are as useful in the study of film---papers, letters, diaries, memoranda, all provide insights into the personalities of the film-makers and help to reveal the social, political and psychological elements from which that film was fashioned. As Professor Donald Watt put it during the course of a radio broadcast:

6. I am indebted for this summary on the nature of film to Professor Raymond Fielding's article, "Archives of the Motion Picture: A General View", American Archivist, Vol. 30, No.3, July 1967, pp.493-495.

The historian has to know the context in which each film was made, the personal history, the intellectual pedigree and the politico-philosophical outlook of all those who played a significant part in the appearance of the film under review.⁷

Film is also a corporate art. As such this means, particularly with regard to the newsreels, that no one person can be held responsible for its production. Obviously there are many artists and workers on a film without whose contribution the film could not be made. Everybody from the assignment editor, the cameraman, the editor, the script-writer and the commentator, to the sound effects man and the musical director could and did influence the outcome of a specific newsreel. Film is also a business. As Nicholas Pronay put it:

The newsreel companies were run by parent companies as a break-even advertising unit to keep their names before the cinemagoers and to keep off others who would undoubtedly have filled their time span on the screen...Newsreels were a well received way of making up the programme.⁸

Film is a technological art. No other art form interposes so much technical know-how between the artist and his audience as does the film. So if the art of the film is to be understood, so also must the equipment and the technical process involved in its execution. The limitations of its

7. Donald Watt, "Historians and the Camera", Wednesday November 18, 1970, B.B.C., Radio 3, 2050-2110. (Mimeographed copy).

8. Pronay, "Audience and Producers", p.416.

technology can sometimes impose a severe burden on the credibility of film as a record of what actually happened, for:

The news cameraman has been kept on the doorstep or allowed in for the few, carefully posed, unrevealing shots. He hasn't seen the processes of secret diplomacy, the forming of strategy, the details of economic policy.⁹

These characteristics then define the nature of film as a medium of communication and cognizance should be taken of them in any analysis using film as a historical source. But these characteristics in themselves invite more questions. For as Hans Magnus Enzensberger notes:

Every use of the media presupposes manipulation. The most elementary processes in media production, from the choice of the medium itself, to shooting, cutting, synchronisation, dubbing right up to distribution, are all operations carried out on raw material...The question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them.¹⁰

If, as the defining characteristics of film suggest, it was in the nature of the newsreels to be manipulated then this research will need to investigate who it was that manipulated them, what their purpose was and whether they acted on their own initiative. Yet it might also need to go even further. For it has been suggested that:

9. Houston, "The nature of the evidence", p.92.

10. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a theory of the media", New Left Review, No.64, November-December 1970, p.20.

Organisations that have culture goals institutionalise conditions needed for the creation and preservation of symbolic objects, their application, and the creation and reinforcement of commitment to such objects.¹¹

And if that is indeed the case with regard to the newsreels then there is also a need to examine the nature of the newsreel organisations and precisely what symbolic objects it was that they were fostering.

To this end the study attempts to investigate the following factors:

1. The technological evolution of the newsreel up to the Spanish Civil War.

2. The ownership of the newsreel companies, their relationships with their parent companies, and the financial state of the newsreel industry.

3. The organisational structure of the newsreel companies, their personnel and the production techniques.

4. The nature of the technology and the technicians at their disposal.

5. The structure for the exhibition of the newsreels and the characteristics of the cinema audience.

6. The content of the newsreels.

7. The relations between the newsreel companies, the public and the government of the day, with regard to matters of censorship.

8. The place of the newsreels in the general political, social and cultural structure of society at the time.

After such an investigation of the newsreels and newsreel companies this survey will then go on to look at a case study of the Spanish Civil War in order to determine

11. Amitai Etzioni, Comparative Analysis of Complex Organisations, Glencoe, Illinois, 1961, p.73.

what value film might have as a historical source. In this instance the purpose will be to examine what messages and what information might be gleaned from the newsreel coverage on Spain, whether the newsreels were attempting to manipulate public opinion, who was doing the manipulation, and whether it was indeed true that the newsreel organisations had culture goals which demanded the creation and preservation of symbolic objects.

(b) The Evolution of the Newsreel

By the advent of the Spanish Civil War the newsreels were a well established phenomenon. However in view of the massive amounts of film and resources which were by that time being expanded on feature film production, it was all too easily forgotten that:

Newsreels are not an extraneous branch of cinematographic work, grafted on to the essential business of film production. On the contrary, the cinema itself developed¹ out of the presentation of topical events.

The Lumière brothers had begun the process of showing actuality film to "cinema" audiences in 1895 and within a very short time collections of such film reportage were being assembled and shown under the title of "topicals". The earliest examples of this material in Britain consisted of film of the 1896 Derby, which was shot by Robert W. Paul, and the Pathé film library also has coverage of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. Kenneth Gordon, a newsreel cameraman in his day, maintained that the first regular topical coverage was made by an American firm, the Biograph Company, which established itself with laboratories in Great Windmill Street, on the site of the Windmill Theatre, and began by covering such occurrences as the Derby and the Boat Race.² In 1895

1. Peter Baechlin and Maurice Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, Paris 1952, p.9.

2. Kenneth Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", British Kinematography, Vol. 17, No.2, p.48.

the Lumière films had never exceeded 65 feet in length,³ but within two years the Biograph stories had reached 160 feet in length.⁴

In these early days of film, the news was mostly covered by private showmen for use in peep-shows or music halls. Their films were not rented, but sold to exhibitors, who screened the prints until they were worn out. Such film-makers were quick to appreciate the commercial value of filming famous personages and historic events. By 1898 A.J. West had started combining the topical he secured with interest films of the Royal Navy and these were shown under the title "Our Navy" for several years in the West End of London. Charles Urban, Will Barker and W. Jeapes started the Warwick Trading Company, and later the Charles Urban Trading Company, both of which covered in one-reel issues events such as the Grand National, for exhibition at London music halls. Topicals were shown at Gatti's in Westminster Bridge Road, and at the Old Standard which became the Victoria Palace. Robert Paul introduced his "Animatograph" into the Alhambra, the "Back Projection" was shown at the Empire and the "Bio" at the Palace.⁵ Topical companies arrived and disappeared with some frequency during these years. W.S. Barker founded the Autoscope Company, while W.C. McDowell and A. Bloomfield left the Biograph Company to

3. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, p.10.

4. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.48.

5. Ex-Ray, Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, August-October 1936, p.58.

set up their own British and Colonial Films. At the time two Biograph cameramen, W.K.L. Dickson and J. Rosenthal, were showing the potential for war coverage with film of the Boer War and the Russo-Japanese War. Other events of note that were covered included President McKinley's inauguration in 1897, Gladstone's funeral in 1898 and Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901.⁶

But it was the French, always the pioneers of film and film culture, who set up the newsreel organisations which were to cover the world and set the example for the rest to follow. In 1907 Charles Pathé started his Pathé Journal in Paris with offices soon to follow in London, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Milan and Barcelona. By 1910 his British newsreel, the Animated Gazette, was in full operation, although at first the British material was filmed here and processed in Paris. Soon afterwards Léon Gaumont started the British Gaumont Graphic. The third French competitor, the Eclair Journal, also started a British company but it quickly disappeared. The home grown competitors included the Warwick Chronicle, founded by Charles Urban, the Topical Budget, founded by W. Jeapes and W. Wrench, and the Williamson News.⁷ The birth of these companies co-incided with two important changes in the film industry. The first was the changeover from travelling shows to permanent cinemas where, because the audience remained largely constant, the topical programme had to be renewed frequently. The second was the changeover

6. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.48.

7. Ibid.

from outright sales of material to film-renting.⁸

The nature of their content is adequately conveyed by the subjects contained in Pathé's first issue which comprised a sculling contest, a strike of Camden factory girls and Queen Alexandra leaving to visit Italy.⁹ Because the film was developed and printed in France at the beginning the pictures of British events could take several weeks to cross the Channel and come back again for exhibition. But the service was soon speeded up, particularly after rivals appeared in the topical field, and very quickly a system of releasing a new reel every week became established. This was shortly followed by a service whereby two newsreels were provided every week. Of course since there was no sound on the film, all the messages describing the people, places and content had to be served up by the use of captions, both before and during a particular story. Such limitations meant however that the best visual footage, which was acknowledged to speak for itself and engage the audience's attention, was considered to be film of catastrophes or war.

The coming of the First World War provided a lot of such material although the cameramen were limited by government instructions about what they could film. During the Great War, the newsreel firms banded together and formed

8. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, pp.10-11.

9. Philip Norman, "The newsreels", The Sunday Times Magazine, January 10, 1971, p.11.

the Cinematograph Trade Topical Committee in an attempt to secure as much film as possible of the war. But this organisation was subsumed into the War Office Cinematograph Committee, under the chairmanship of Sir William Jury, as a result of which film shot by individual newsreels was generally distributed under government control to all the companies. In fact the British Government even went so far as to buy up the Topical Budget in November, 1916, and to run it as an Official War News, though after the war Jeapes re-purchased it. The Great War showed most of all the potential value to a government in using newsreels in particular and film in general for the purposes of home front propaganda and for the dissemination of knowledge, always biased, upon matters of governmental interest. They were somewhat late in the day in setting up a Ministry of Information in February, 1918, under Beaverbrook, which had a cinematographic branch with the capacity to make films for various Government departments. Theoretically the Ministry had no concern with opinion within Britain since one department, under Rudyard Kipling, was aimed at American and Allied opinion, and another, under Rothermere, was aimed at the neutrals.¹⁰ However the Ministry did conduct propaganda on the Home Front, to such an extent that Mr. Leif Jones felt compelled to raise a question in Parliament concerning "the possibility that public propaganda may be misused for commercial and class purposes" and expressing his fears that

10. A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945, London 1965, p.107.

"capitalistic interests had suborned national propaganda".¹¹

The point of his remarks was contained in a speech which read:

I have a record of a very extraordinary film which is being performed now....The title of the picture was "Once a Hun, always a Hun". It first of all depicts two German soldiers in a ruined town in France. They meet a woman with a baby in her arms, and strike her to the ground. The two German soldiers then gradually merge into two commercial travellers, and are seen in an English village after the war. One of the travellers enters a small village general store, and proceeds to show to the shopkeeper a pan. The shopkeeper at the beginning is somewhat impressed by what is offered to him for sale, when his wife comes in and, turning the pan upside down, sees marked on it "Made in Germany". She then indulges in a good deal of scorn at the expense of the commercial traveller and calls in a policeman, who orders the German out of the shop. A final notice, flashed on the screen, was to the effect that there cannot possibly be any more trading with these people after the war, and under this statement were the words, "Ministry of Information". The question of the policy of trade after the war has got to be decided by this country, but I hope the Ministry of Information does not intend to decide it before we have an opportunity even of discussing the Government policy.¹²

For all Leif Jones' fears that the Ministry of Information was committing the country in advance to a policy which parliament had not yet decided upon, it would appear that in the short term the propaganda effort and the use of film in particular during the First World War met with great

11. Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in World War I, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971 (1st edn., London 1927), p.40.

12. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in World War I, p.41.

success.¹³

But by 1919 the content of newsreel releases was almost back to the normal fare of celebrities, royal personages, and notable events. They simply reverted, slowly but surely, to what had won the public's interest prior to 1914. The Pathé Gazette content checklist for July 3, 1919,¹⁴ was full of material appertaining to the end of the war and the signing of peace and contained:

Peace Day: Huge crowds throng Trafalgar Square at 3.00 p.m. Mrs Lloyd George announces "Peace is signed". Thousands flock to acclaim the King at Buckingham Palace. The King and Queen and Royal Family appear. The King meets and drives back with Mr Lloyd George who brought us "Peace with Honour".

The Historic Scene at Versailles: The German delegates arrive and are conducted to the Hall of Mirrors. The Big Four are seen to the left of the picture. The Signing. The Prime Minister and Mrs. Lloyd George home again at Downing Street.

Yet the very next Gazette hinted of the sort of story which would once again come to occupy most of the newsreel space with pieces on Henley and a Transatlantic airship. It contained:

Another air triumph: The R34, the first transatlantic air liner. (Approved for publication by the Air Ministry.) Sixteen American officers decorated by Sir Douglas Haig on the Horse Guards Parade.

13. John Grierson, "That unscrupulous rascal Northcliffe", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.11, February 1938, pp.16-17.

14. Pathé Gazette Issue No.577, 3/7/19.

The Proclaiming of Peace: The old-world ceremony at Temple Bar. A fanfare announces the arrival of Bluemantle to the Lord Mayor who gives permission for the cavalcade to enter. Reading the proclamation at the Royal Exchange. Chilly Henley: Bad weather mars opening day's racing. Scuttled: All that is visible of the once ¹⁵ proud German "High Seas" Fleet at Scapa Flow.

It was with the arrival of peacetime conditions and the onset of the twenties that rivalry between the respective newsreel companies for the attention of the cinemagoing audience became intense. During this period the Gaumont Graphic was dubbed "The Gruesome Graphic" by malicious competitors, the Empire Screen News became "The Impure Screen News", and the Topical Budget was renamed "The Comical Budget". In order to win and hold onto their audience figures the Pathé and Gaumont reels started special women's editions. Fate sometimes took a hand in dispensing with rivals as when Topical Budget's offices were burned down after a fire which also damaged the facade of their neighbour's building at Pathé. But Pathé was by now an international concern and they could afford to rebuild. Although Topical Budget had been a domestic success, it simply did not have enough financial backing to be able to sustain such a loss and start again. It collapsed as a newsreel company soon after the fire.

Most of the newsreels were constantly expanding. Out of the small 300 feet newsreel of 1910 grew the "super" British reel of 1926, some 750 feet long. The three or four

15. Pathé Gazette Issue No.578, 7/7/19.

item Gazette became six or seven items by 1920. Such an unprecedented demand for newsreel reportage necessitated an increase in staff and capital expenditure, for coverage on the spot, which some of the small British concerns were not able to accommodate during a period of economic crisis. But what finally killed the smaller companies was the advent of sound in 1928 and the subsequent increase, once again, to an average newsreel length of 850 feet, comprising some eight, ten or even twelve stories.¹⁶

As with the rest of the film industry, the newsreel companies, with the exception of Fox Movietone of America, hoped that the "talkies" would be no more than a passing fad. But Movietone decided to grasp the opportunity to go ahead of their rivals. They decided to expand their American operations and arrived in Britain in 1928 with British Movietone News. Movietone equipped their newsreel entirely with sound which meant travelling to locations with several hundredweight of equipment such as microphones and cable, in a sound van, all of which could cost as much as £10,000 for each unit. None but the bigger companies could afford this new outlay in expenditure. Furthermore the advent of sound also saw an increase in pay to cameramen, obviously in an attempt to secure the services of the more experienced men who might be able to manage the new technical accomplishments. In his book Useless if Delayed, Paul Wyand tells how in 1928, as a British cameraman for American Fox in London, his pay was £5 a week. In 1929 he joined the

16.

Fred Watts, "Pioneer recalls struggles of early newsreel", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.4, July 1936, p.42.

British branch of Pathé at a salary of £9 a week, but later in the same year he rejoined Fox, this time as a cameraman for British Movietone, at a starting wage of £10 per week, rising at six-monthly intervals to £14.¹⁷

At the very beginning of their venture British Movietonews, who imported the first sound equipment from America, insisted upon shooting everything with sound. They set themselves up in offices in Berners Street, brought over half-a-dozen American cameramen for good measure and bought a fleet of left-hand Rio Speedwagons to ferry their equipment around. But they did not have to travel far to find people willing enough to commit themselves to sound on film, for as Paul Wyand put it:

One of the first people to appreciate the pack-'em-in value of "talking" newsreels was the then Prime Minister, Ramsay McDonald, who invited us to make a film in the garden at Downing Street. In it he introduced his Cabinet Ministers, each of whom mouthed a few platitudes into the microphone. The film resulted in queues outside every cinema at which it was shown, not due to some sudden awakening of the political consciousness, but because this was a newsreel with the additional marvel of sound.¹⁸

The other stories contained in the very first sound newsreel included items on rowing, Army horse-trials, and a piece on the Duke of York, later George VI. At the time Movietone had five silent British counterparts. These were Pathé, Gaumont, Topical Budget, Empire News and British Screen News. Within a short time those that had not assimilated

17. Paul Wyand, Useless if Delayed, London 1959, p.30.

18. Wyand, Useless if Delayed, p.41.

sound into their newsreels were to die or to be bought out. Gaumont Graphic was the second company to introduce sound, though they cleverly tried to insure themselves against a sudden downfall in the popularity of the talkies by continuing their silent edition for a while and allowing exhibitors a choice between the two. Pathé followed suit soon after. Paramount set up production facilities in Britain in 1931 and were the fourth company to accommodate for sound recording. The Empire Screen News failed to do so, and they were bought up by Universal who were also looking for British opportunities to extend their American operations.¹⁹

By the beginning of the thirties then the lines were drawn and the stage was set for a monopoly of the British newsreel industry which was to be dominated by five major companies, all affiliated to major international film corporations, and which was to last until the demise of the cinema newsreel itself. Gaumont, Pathé, Movietone, Paramount and Universal were the big five and seemed intent to remain so, by fair means or foul, for many years to come. For, if the twenties had been distinguished by a strong sense of rivalry within the newsreel industry, then the early thirties could only be properly described as the era of "the newsreel war", prompted by the arrival on the scene of the large American film corporations. One reason for the emergence of a war was put forward by Paul Wyand when he commented:

In the twenties, it must be remembered
that there was no television, picture

19. Norman, "The newsreels", pp.11-12.

magazines such as Illustrated and Picture Post were still many years away and newspaper reproduction of photographs was, in the main, both technically poor and editorially unimaginative. Consequently there was a tremendous demand for newsreels and this in itself stimulated rivalry.²⁰

But that reason by itself does not adequately explain the deep feelings of mutual animosity which reached its height during the first half of the decade which followed. The main cause of the trouble was the sudden granting of exclusive rights for coverage of various events which all the newsreels had habitually attended. For the most part these events consisted of such things as the Grand National, the more important football matches, particularly during the latter stages of the F.A. Cup, and other similar sporting activities. Once the desire to "scoop" these events got into full swing, the rivalry to secure exclusives manifested itself in every realm of newsreel activity. It achieved such notoriety that the feature film industry incestuously determined to capitalise upon it with a 1938 film entitled "Too Hot to Handle" starring Clark Gable as an intrepid newsreel cameraman, intent upon getting the best story available, even at the expense of losing the affection of his loved one, in the delightful form of Myrna Loy.

Many commentators have noted the existence of this rivalry between the newsreel companies with such statements as "the newsreel companies also indulged in a kind of competition between themselves which was reminiscent of

20. Wyand, Useless if Delayed, p.29.

the Wild West."²¹ But few of them have pinpointed the cause, after 1930, as lying with the granting of exclusive rights, and the opening up of the opportunity to bid for them, something that was actually brought about by the action of organisations outside the film industry. The responsibility really rests with those bodies who felt they could capitalise upon the desire of the newsreels to be present as important occasions in order to extort large sums of money from them. For by 1936 a big event was costing Gaumont British up to £2,000 on rights alone, apart from their weekly budget which amounted to £3,000 for two editions.²² The competition between the newsreel companies simply intensified, not only in the race to secure exclusive rights, but also in their attempts to pirate material at events for which one company alone was supposed to hold a monopoly.

'The evidence relating to this pirating remains purely anecdotal in character and generally results from the reminiscences of former newsreel cameramen who took part in the numerous encounters. It is therefore only fitting that it should be summed up by one of their number, who did so as follows:

Then Gaumont entered the war, buying up all the rights they could, some of which they shared with Movietone. Pathé lost the rights of the Grand National by being outbid, and we had to become a pirate at this fixture. Pathé used scaffold towers: fights took place around these, although they were outside the course.

21. Pronay, "Audience and Producers", p.416.

22. "Aeroplanes and tape machines cover the world", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.3, June 1936, p.22.

The towers were built at the last minute; on our stand were Jock Gemmell, with his range of long focus lenses, and myself with the slow motion camera. Then the fight was on. Our opponents got hold of the rope which we used to lift our gear, and started to pull the tower over. Just as this 60ft. tower was about to topple over, someone cut the rope and we just managed to get our cameras lined up. The race had started. Then we were attacked for a second time. Fireworks were started in front of the cameras, which frightened the horses, causing the favourite, Golden Miller, to fall in front of our slow-motion camera. That season's test matches brought out balloons, heavy net, and many other tricks to stop filming. The balloons were punctured by air-gun fire, and the pictures stolen.²³

However by 1936, because of the competitive and ever-increasing spiral of bidding, the price being demanded for exclusive film rights had risen out of all proportion to the earning capacity of the newsreels. And as a result of a conference called by the Cinematograph Exhibition Association in that same year, all the newsreels agreed to co-operate on big national events for a period of one year. Not surprisingly the situation was immediately eased and the newsreels showed a degree of harmony which nobody, least of all themselves, could possibly have foreseen. This was borne out in May, 1936, over the coverage of the F.A. Cup Final for that year. Between them the newsreels offered a sum in the region of £2,000 for the rights to film the game. Wembley Stadium, however, held out for more money and refused to grant such rights. So the newsreels got together and decided to withdraw their first offer, substituting

23. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.50.

in its place a smaller one. Needless to say Wembley now rejected the offer outright and started making plans to film the match for themselves. They intended to release the completed film in the form of featurettes which would be distributed at £12.10s per booking. The newsreels responded to this boycott by hiring planes and autogyros which they were finally given permission to use, since they were on good terms with the Air Ministry. Because the Wembley Authorities rarely, if ever, had cause to consult the Air Ministry, their attempts to dissuade the latter body from granting permission to hover and fly over Wembley Stadium quite naturally fell upon deaf ears. The outcome was as World Film News recounted:

Came the day. Under the command of the intrepid Campbell Black, the flying armada took to the air and the sky was black with long-focus lenses. Everybody got a picture, the cinemas had it by early evening and democracy was saved.²⁴

The harmony manifested by the newsreels over this particular incident took them completely by surprise. For a while the Football League, who were quite innocent of what ensued over a Football Association Cup Final, were worried by a retaliatory threat from at least one newsreel company that during the following League season, they might feel compelled to boycott the film coverage of all soccer matches. However such a threat never materialised and soccer continued to be

24. "Soccer league boycott may follow Cup Final squabble", World Film News, Vol. 1 No.3, June 1936, p.22.

shown in the cinemas and on the newsreels, though newsreel cameramen and producers never quite forgot their capacity for working together, should the occasion ever arise.

This then was the position which the newsreels found themselves in on the eve of the Spanish Civil War. They had reached a stage whereby they manifested what Baechlin and Muller-Strauss described as being the general characteristics of newsreels. These characteristics included the following features:

(a) They appear regularly, at relatively short intervals, being issued monthly, fortnightly, weekly or even bi-weekly, according to the country in which they appear. (In the case of Britain, this was bi-weekly.)

(b) Each of the issues includes several topics which are not directly related.

(c) In principle, each of the topics presented relates to current events of general interest at the time of presentation.

(d) The films are generally of a standard length.

(e) The presentation is straightforward, whereas that of screen magazines and documentaries is interpretative or didactic.²⁵

On the whole the British newsreels in 1936 manifested all these characteristics of the modern newsreel. There were slight variations. It will be seen, for instance, that some newsreels cleverly related one topic or item in an issue either to the preceding topic or to the subsequent topic, in order to point out a certain contrast or emphasise a particular point. Furthermore the presentation

25. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, p.9.



was not always so straightforward, and the newsreels manifested a capacity for interpretation just as much as any other form of film. This was appreciated by some film critics very early in the day. In 1933, for example, Donald Fraser commented:

British Movietone strives after a B.B.C. impartiality, although it is a B.B.C. jockey trying to ride a Wardour Street horse. Paramount News approximates very closely to the American tabloid. Gaumont Graphic suggests a bourgeois atmosphere, redolent of public houses. While Universal Talking News inclines more and more to the funny page of the Chorlton-cum-Hardy Gazette.²⁶

One thing, however, was beyond dispute. By 1936 the newsreels in this country had evolved to a point whereby five major companies were in virtual command of the news bearing potential within the cinema industry and, indeed, these same five companies were to retain control throughout the years of the Spanish conflict and in fact until the very death of the cinema newsreel itself.

26. Donald Fraser, "Newsreel, Reality or Entertainment?", Sight and Sound, Autumn 1933, pp.89-90.

(c) The Money Behind the Newsreel Screen

At the beginning of 1936 there were five major companies producing and distributing newsreels within Britain. All of them were subsidiaries of feature film companies. Gaumont British News was a subsidiary of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, which also controlled Gainsborough Pictures; Pathé Gazette was a subsidiary of the Associated British Picture Corporation which also had interests in British International Pictures; British Movietone was controlled by the American film company, Twentieth-Century Fox; Paramount News was owned by a subsidiary of the American Paramount company; and the Universal News was produced by British Pictorial Productions and affiliated to the Universal Film Company of America.

Yet for all their undoubted independence of each other and their respective parent companies, at the production level, there can be no doubt that financial inter-relations were known to exist between several of these companies and that fact in itself may go some way towards explaining how "the big five" secured a monopoly of the newsreel industry from 1936 onwards.

The Gaumont British Picture Corporation was formed in March, 1927. The original Gaumont concern in London had been founded in as early as 1898 by Lt.-Col. A.C. Bromhead but it had at that time only served as an agency for Léon Gaumont of Paris. By 1922 the Gaumont Company had come entirely under British control with the major interest being acquired by Bromhead and his British associates. In 1927

the Gaumont British Picture Corporation was formed to acquire the Gaumont Company and Bromhead was appointed chairman of this new company, though he resigned from the position in 1929.¹

By January, 1936, the Gaumont British Picture Corporation Ltd., was controlled by the Metropolis and Bradford Trust Co. Ltd. It owned 2,915,000 Ordinary 10s shares out of a total issue of 5,000,000. However of those 2,915,000 shares 2,100,000 were held on behalf of the Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corporation, and 815,000 were held on behalf of three brothers, Maurice, Mark and Isidore Ostrer.² Already it can be seen that there were two newsreel companies interested in the fortunes of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation. First of all there was the Gaumont British Newsreel itself and, secondly, there was the Movietone News, which was owned by Twentieth-Century Fox. This dual interest was also reflected in the composition of the board of directors of G.B.P.C., as indeed was a third newsreel interest. For the board consisted of the following members:

Isidore Ostrer (President).

Mark Ostrer (Chairman and Managing Director).

Maurice Ostrer (Assistant Managing Director).

S.R. Kent.

Dixon Broadman.

1. F.D. Klingender and Stuart Legg, The Money Behind the Screen, London 1937, p.23.

2. Ibid.

O.H.C. Balfour.

J. Maxwell.

Col. H.A. Micklam.

C.H. Dade.

I.P. Little.³

If the Gaumont interest was reflected in the presence of the Ostrers, then the Twentieth-Century Fox concern was reflected in the presence of S.R.Kent, O.H.C. Balfour and D. Broadman. For Kent was at the same time the President of Twentieth-Century Fox, while Balfour and Broadman were the chairman and managing director respectively of Balfour, Broadman and Co., who were the Fox bankers in this country.⁴ It should also be noted that one of the directors, John Maxwell, was in turn the chairman and managing director of the Associated British Picture Corporation, who ran the Pathé Gazette.

The same triple interest manifested itself in the ownership of the controlling company, Metropolis and Bradford Trust, where the shares were divided among the following members:⁵

"A" shares (Voting). 5,100 by Isidore Ostrer.

4,700 by Twentieth-Century Fox.

100 by W.J. Hutchinson
(Manager, Fox).

50 by S.R. Kent (President, Fox)

50 by R.B. McDonald (Solicitor,
Fox).

3. Ibid., p.24.

4. Ibid., p.25.

5. Ibid., p.24

"B" shares (non-Voting).	750,000 by United American Investment Corporation (for Fox). 250,000 by John Maxwell on behalf of A.B.P.C.
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The 250,000 "B" shares had been owned by the Ostrers until October, 1936, when they sold them to John Maxwell on behalf of A.B.P.C. In return they received 300,000 ordinary shares in A.B.P.C. Maxwell's intention was not only to participate in the financial benefits that might accrue from the Metropolis and Bradford but also to obtain control of Gaumont British. To this end in November he also acquired a five-year option on the 5,100 voting shares but Fox objected to such a takeover and the control of Gaumont British remained unchanged.⁶ The proposed takeover would have severely affected the nature of the newsreel industry in Britain and these considerations must have weighed heavily in Fox's deliberations over the matter. For the Movietone newsreel was shown at a percentage of Gaumont British cinemas. If Maxwell had secured the shares, there was a strong likelihood that the Pathé Gazette would have replaced the Movietone reel in those Gaumont cinemas, as well as being shown in their own A.B.C. theatres. In such an eventuality Movietone would have been prevented from entry into either of the two largest cinema circuits then operating in Britain. For a while the cinema's trade press

6. Political and Economic Planning, The British Film Industry, London 1952, p.67.

was full of talk about this "Guy Fawkes Deal"⁷ and about Gaumont and A.B.C. being "past rivals, future brothers".⁸ The final outcome meant that nothing changed on the newsreel front. The major threat throughout this period to the stability of three of the big five newsreel companies was scotched by the control which one of them held over the share ownership of one of its rivals.

Apart from their holdings in Gaumont, Twentieth-Century Fox of course still retained a controlling interest in their own newsreel product, the British Movietone News. But here the Harmsworth family also held a strong influence. For Movietone was jointly controlled by Fox and the Hon. Esmor Harmsworth, who was at the same time the chairman of Associated Newspapers, Ltd., Daily Mail and General Trust, Ltd., as well as being a director of Imperial Airways, Ltd. Fox held 25,498 shares at 7/6, and Harmsworth held 21,500 shares of the 50,000 shares available. The board of directors included the names of two men already familiar to Gaumont, S.R. Kent and R.B. McDonald, who represented Fox, the Hon. E. Harmsworth and G.W. Price, on behalf of Associated Newspapers, and a fifth member, F.L. Harley.⁹ The Movietone reel was the newsreel most closely associated with the world of journalism in the form of Harmsworth and G. Ward Price,

7. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.9, December 1936, p.40.

8. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.8, November 1936, p.38.

9. Klingender and Legg, The Money Behind the Screens, p.4

the leading foreign correspondent of the Daily Mail.

The Pathé Gazette comprised part of the mammoth Associated British Picture Corporation. With the exception of John Maxwell, the chairman and managing director, none of the other five directors were represented on the boards of rival film companies. The largest single block of ordinary shares, amounting to a total of 1,569,000, was held by Cinema Investments, Ltd., a private company controlled and owned by Maxwell and four of his associates.¹⁰ However, after October 12, 1936, the largest individual shareholders of the company were the Ostrers who had obtained their 300,000 ordinary shares as part of the exchange deal with Maxwell for their non-voting Gaumont shares.

Universal Talking News was produced for the American parent company of the same name by British Pictorial Productions, Ltd., which had no financial inter-action with any of the other newsreel companies in the way that Gaumont, Movietone and Pathé had. British Pictorial Production had been registered as a company in 1926 with a £5,000 share capital of £1 each. In the beginning it had produced the Empire News Bulletin but that reel was subsumed into the Universal Talking News with the advent of sound film. The directors were three in number; W.C. Jeapes (Managing director), C.W. Jeapes and A.P. Smith, who were also the only shareholders.¹¹ However Universal News had strong

10. Ibid., pp.30-31.

11. Ibid., p.41.

links with perhaps the most expansive cinema corporation during the years from 1936 to 1939, J. Arthur Rank's General Cinema Finance Corporation.

Immediately after its formation in March, 1936, the G.C.F.C. took over one of the largest film distributors in Britain, the General Film Distributors which had been founded in June, 1935, by C.M. Woolf after his resignation from Gaumont British. Furthermore over the next few years it added the Odeon chain of cinemas and the County Cinemas circuit to its small G.C.F.C. circuit to become the third largest exhibitor after Gaumont and A.B.C. Early in 1936 the major American company, Universal, was wrested from the control of its founder, Carl Laemmle, by a group of American and British financiers including Rank. As a result of this transaction Universal News passed into the domain of the G.C.F.C., was distributed by General Film Distributors and shown in many of the Odeon cinemas.¹² And as a result of the heady euphoria and over-investment engendered by the world wide success of Korda's film "The Private Life of Henry VIII", Gaumont British suffered a slump and decided it was no longer economic to run their production studios at Shepherd's Bush, nor their distribution facilities. So General Film Distributors also acquired the rights to distribute the Gaumont newsreel. From April, 1937, Universal News therefore became inadvertently wedded with the Gaumont British Newsreel, albeit only at the level of distribution.¹³

12. P.E.P., The British Film Industry, p.62.

13. See above p.70; and also The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.1, April 1937, p.28

The only newsreel that remained completely free of any ties whatsoever with its fellow competitors was the British Paramount News, which appeared to remain entirely the property of American Paramount pictures and which sought an exhibition outlet through the many independent cinemas up and down the country, thereby precluding the necessity for forging any links with its rivals either at the level of distribution or large circuit exhibition.

These five newsreels held a monopoly so strong that it became virtually impossible for control to be taken away from any one of them or for a new arrival to impose upon their dominance. It has already been seen how John Maxwell's attempts to radically alter the status quo came to nothing. The circumstances surrounding the short-lived and ill-fated National News reveal how difficult it was for a newcomer to survive.

The National News was the brainchild of Norman Loudon, the chairman of Sound City Ltd., which gained a reputation as "one of Britain's smaller but thoroughly efficient production and distribution companies".¹⁴ In July, 1937, he engaged as his editor-in-chief, Cecil R. Snape, who had spent thirteen years as the editor of the Empire News, later the Universal Talking News. Their intentions were sufficiently interesting and different. It was their desire to break away from the almost obligatory length of 850 ft. per newsreel length, and to print three different lengths

14. The Commentator, "Newsreel Flashes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.7, October 1937, p.35.

in order to offer sufficient variety for exhibitors. There would be a five star reel, running for 1,200 ft., a four star of 800 ft., and a three star of 500 ft. The hiring costs would vary accordingly. The make-up of the reel would consist of a smaller number of bigger stories, thereby dispensing with the polyglot News in Flashes of Gaumont and the News Flashes from Everywhere as used by Paramount. It was hoped that these longer stories would allow for more news in depth, along the lines of the monthly March of Time newsreel compilation. Finally it was promised that the commentator would be allowed to collaborate in the writing of scripts for stories before they were shot and that he would work in close co-operation with the editors and cutters. Their intention here was to emulate a similar style of commentating/editing to that so successfully evolved at Gaumont where Ted Emmett was in charge of both functions. Their commentator was to be Tommy Woodroffe, a B.B.C. announcer who had apparently made a name for himself when he was sent to Spithead for the Coronation Naval Review of May 1937. Night fell, fireworks were started, and Woodroffe was heard to say in his commentary: "The fleet's all lit up", only to add as a corrective rejoinder, "When I say lit up, I mean, with lights".¹⁵ Evidently Snape considered that such a faux pas was enough to endear him as a newsreel commentator.

The first National News release was issued on October 11, 1937, and withdrawn on the afternoon of October 13. In November it tried an "experimental" Armistice edition but

15. Ibid.

the cinema managers were not interested in trying it out in their cinemas. It closed down that same month. Two reasons account for its failure. First of all it received a critical panning and "Terribly disappointing" was the unanimous verdict.¹⁶ But most of all it failed because it could not secure a regular stream of distribution to cinemas which already had strong ties with other newsreels. There can be little doubt that the existing newsreel companies exerted pressure on their distribution outlets not to take up the new product. It was rumoured that National News had pinned its hopes most of all upon encroaching into the Odeon circuit,¹⁷ but the Odeons already had the choice between Universal News and Gaumont British News, as offered to them by General Film Distributors. This factor, together with poor quality of its first issue, meant that National News never really had much chance of success in the close-knit world of the newsreel.

But what chance did the big five newsreel companies have of success? Did the uncertain situation in film finance during the years between 1936 and 1939 affect the outcome of newsreel production at all and did they suffer any cutback?

Both these questions are impossible to answer with any degree of certainty, for, as The Factual Film put it, "The balance sheets of the newsreel companies are the private

16. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.8, November 1937, p.37.

17. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.10, January 1938, p.37.

concern of their parent companies and no separate disclosures of newsreel budgets are made."¹⁸ However for all the lack of information where newsreel budgets are concerned, there is enough evidence available to enable one to speculate generally about the state of newsreel finance.

Perhaps the most important point to be made at the outset is that whether the newsreels made money or not, it is highly unlikely that they would have suffered any cutback, even during a period of financial stringency, either in resources at their disposal, or in economic backing. Two reasons have been put forward to help in reaching this conclusion. The first argument states:

What is of significance is that the newsreel companies were run by their parent-companies as a break-even advertising unit to keep their names before the cinemagoers and to keep off others who would undoubtedly have filled their time span on the screen.¹⁹

The second argument is similar in scope and suggests:

The most important feature of newsreel finances is that whether they make a profit or not, they always have the backing of the parent company and would probably continue production for the sake of prestige even in the face of a financial loss.²⁰

Advertising and prestige then are two reasons why it is generally accepted that regardless of the financial state of the newsreel industry, whether it was healthy or otherwise,

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- 18. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, London 1947, p.139.
 - 19. Pronay, "Audience and Producers", p.416.
 - 20. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.139.

the standards of newsreel production were not likely to suffer. Nor indeed was there any likelihood of them closing down, at least not in the face of competition from other sectors of the film industry alone. And both arguments do carry a considerable amount of validity. Since most newsreels were allied to feature film companies, it was more than likely that an audience would see one particular company's name several times during the course of an evening's entertainment. And the film companies lived in as much hope of an audience associating quality with their product, whatever form it took, as did the cinema managers of generating an A.B.C. audience, an Odeon audience, or a Gaumont audience.

However, despite the paucity of evidence on newsreel budgets, it is also not unreasonable to suggest that at least one newsreel company did in fact make money during this period of their existence. Of course the difficulty in attempting to ascertain precisely how much money it made depends upon knowing how much their newsreels cost to produce, and how much they took in return. But for Gaumont British there are certain facts and figures available that go some way towards answering both those questions.

In an interview he gave for World Film News, Castleton Knight, who was in charge of production at Gaumont, maintained that by May 1936 their weekly budget for two editions ran to about £3,000 although he stressed the figure was exclusive of specials, where the rights to a big event could cost up to £2,000 extra.²¹ Unless that figure dropped rapidly over

21. "Aeroplanes and tape machines cover the world", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.3, June 1936, p.22.

the next year or so, Castleton Knight must have been guilty of a fair amount of exaggeration. Some degree of exaggeration was expected anyway from Castleton Knight who had earned a reputation for himself as a showman of the first order and who, when a cinema manager, had kidnapped Charlie Chaplin as a publicity stunt. For in 1937 the newsreels overall produced 577 reels with a total length of 606.5 thousands of feet, and at a cost of £296,000.²² Those Board of Trade figures reduce to an average sum of £513 per edition or £1026 for a week's run of two editions, less than half the amount suggested by Castleton Knight who calculated it to be closer to £3,000. The discrepancy between the Board of Trade figures and Castleton Knight's figures can however be accounted for in two ways. First of all, the five newsreel companies did not spend an equal amount of money on their respective productions, and undoubtedly Gaumont would have spent more money on their reels than Universal, for example, which was renowned for its poverty stricken outlook. It would mean that Gaumont's costs would have amounted to more than the Board of Trade's average figure of £1026 per week. Furthermore by 1937 Castleton Knight's figure of £3,000 would have been substantially reduced. For at the time he made his statement regarding costs the newsreel companies were only just on the verge of ending their war and had not yet started collaborating to share the costs of rights for coverage on expensive events.

22. "Films produced within 1937", reprinted from the Board of Trade Journal in Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, May-June, 1939, p.13.

Therefore if both these factors were taken into consideration, it is evident that the cost per week to Gaumont during 1937 for two editions would in all probability be closer to the £2,000 mark.

There are no figures available to reveal how much Gaumont took in return for their product during the period 1936 to 1939. Yet it is noticeable that despite the fact they suffered a bad financial year overall in 1936, at the Annual General Meeting held on November 2, 1936, they still maintained: "With the additional revenue from the newsreel (they should) go on to devote more time to exhibition".²³ Obviously they were making money from their newsreel, a fact further endorsed by yet another statement to the effect that with "the cessation of the production of films other than the Gaumont British Newsreel, the heavy losses incurred in the current year could be non-recurring".²⁴

It would be incorrect to generalise from Gaumont's evident newsreel success and suggest that the other newsreel companies were just as financially sound. But even after the Second World War it is noticeable that all the newsreels were making profits. For the amount of money paid to the renters and producers of newsreels during 1950 came to £2,203,000.²⁵ And there is no reason to assume that the costs of production had escalated much more beyond the pre-War figure of £296,000 already mentioned. If anything there

23. The Times, November 9, 1936.

24. Ibid.

25. P.E.P., The British Film Industry, p.281.

is every reason to believe that the costs of production might even have decreased by 1950 for the stringencies imposed during the war and after had meant that a considerable saving had been made by the reduction in newsreel length from 850 or 900 ft. to an average of 730 ft. per issue. Furthermore there had been a decrease in costs "resulting from the curtailed individual activity under the 'rota' system".²⁶

Perhaps the most important criterion for judging whether the newsreels suffered from any kind of economic losses lies in the fact that even when they were on the point of closing down, one by one, they never called upon the aid of the Quota system. Only after a lot of deliberation did the sole surviving newsreel company, Movietone, invoke the financial help of being included under the Quota rule. What killed the newsreels was not so much lack of money to sustain them, but more the competition from television which could report the news as it happened and transmit it immediately, if necessary.

26. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.137.

(d) The Organisational Structure of the Newsreel

In order to determine what value newsreel film might have for the historian it is essential to know precisely what effect the structure of the newsreel bearing organisations had upon the content of the products they issued. For only then will it be possible to ascertain what areas of manipulation there were inherent in the very process of newsreel production. Such an examination would need to look very closely at the personnel who staffed the newsreel companies, how these men produced the newsreels and what latitude there was for interference with the newsreel content at all stages of production.

It has been suggested, for instance, that "The newsreels of the 1930s belonged much more to the world of journalism than to the film-world".¹ To some extent this observation is correct. It has already been seen that in the ownership of at least one newsreel company, there was a very strong connection. The Fox newsreel service in Britain, British Movietone, was jointly owned by Twentieth Century-Fox, the American parent company, and the Hon. Esmond Harmsworth, who was chairman of Associated Newspapers Ltd., the Daily Mail and General Trust Ltd., and director of Imperial Airways Ltd.² The directors included Harmsworth and G.W.Price on behalf of Associated Newspapers. And of course Harmsworth was the son of Lord Rothermere, the owner of the Daily Mail, and G. Ward Price was the leading foreign correspondent for

1. Pronay, "Their Policies and Impact", p.63.

2. Klingender and Legg, The Money Behind the Screen, p.43.

the Daily Mail. So there was indeed a visible connection at the level of company ownership.

But how far was it also the case that the newsreel companies were staffed by "ex-Fleet street men"?³ And where did the men come from who constituted the personnel of the newsreel companies at all levels?

It is noticeable for instance there was strong criticism levelled at the newsreels that "newsreel policies and organisations are under the control of men who, in fact, are not newsreel men. In only two cases have qualified newsreel men got executive positions and one of these is burdened by non-technical control".⁴ But if it can be seen that the men in control of the newsreel companies were not newsreel or film men even, then neither were they necessarily newspaper men. At the executive level it is evident that the bigger the newsreel company, especially if it formed part of an international combine, the less likelihood there was of finding a man in charge who had experience of either the film or newspaper world. Of course it was only to be expected that such companies would fill their executive positions with men whom one might have confidently found in similar positions anywhere within the normal world of large-scale business.

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3. Nicholas Pronay, "The use of film in History Teaching" in A Short Guide to the Use of Film in History Teaching, by Nicholas Pronay, Betty R. Smith and Tom Hastie, London 1972, p.9.
 4. Ex-Ray, "The Newsreel War", Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, Vol. 1, May 1935, p.2.

At Movietone, for example, the Harmsworth influence was obvious. Gerald Fountaine Sanger occupied the position of executive producer. He was educated at Shrewsbury, served in the Royal Marines from 1917 to 1919 and then went to Keble College, Oxford. From 1922 to 1929 he was secretary to the Hon. Esmond Harmsworth before taking up his position with British Movietone. He was a member of the Windham Club.⁵ In fact within the higher echelons of Movietone there were several such persons. Sir Malcolm Campbell, MBE, was the editor-in-chief and occasionally took on the role of commentator.⁶ Sir Gordon Craig was the general manager. He had been born in 1891 and knighted in 1929. He was a Liveryman of the Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers Company, vice-president of the "Old Contemptibles" Association, and president of the Hackney Branch of the British Legion. His clubs were the Royal Thames Yacht Club and Sunningdale.⁷

The men who ran the production side of the newsreel industry, especially at Gaumont British and Universal News, had stronger connections with the film industry, though none at all still with the world of journalism. Cecil R. Snape, for instance, was the editor-in-charge at Universal and he had been in the film industry for most of his life. Born in 1888, he joined the trade in 1911, becoming the general manager and secretary of the Kinematograph Trading Company Ltd., and its associated concerns. During the war he served

5. Kinematograph Year Book, 1936, p.296.

6. Ibid., p.308.

7. Kinematograph Year Book, 1937, p.311.

as a photographer in the R.F.C. and the R.A.F., then after the war he spent a lot of time in America in feature film production. He returned to Britain as the editor-in-chief of the Empire News Bulletin and later of the Universal Talking News, both of which he ran from the very first issues.⁸ Similarly H.W. Bishop joined the trade in 1910, specialising on the technical and production sides of the industry, first in processing in the laboratories, and then for ten years as a cameraman for newsreel, scientific and studio productions. He was at first technical adviser to the old Gaumont company, and then became production manager for Gaumont British News.⁹ It is also noticeable that H.T. Bromige, the news contact manager, whose position one would have thought might ordinarily have been ascribed to a former Fleet Street man, had in fact been more concerned with the film industry throughout his life than with journalism. Bromige had first joined Gaumont in 1916, working at the beginning of his career, in the accounts and film library departments, before becoming a cameraman then from 1933 becoming the news contact manager for Gaumont British.¹⁰

Even at Movietone the actual production ranks had lots of experience of film, though once again little of journalism. Thomas F. Scales, their assistant editor, had been on the topical side of the business since 1905, starting in the dark room of the Warwick Trading Company before joining

8. Kinematograph Year Book, 1936, p.298.

9. Ibid., p.322.

10. "Big Men of the Reel", in Scoop, the Monthly Bulletin of Gaumont British News, No.1, undated.

Barker's Gaumont and then spending 17 years with Pathé Gazette.¹¹

But if the newsreel executives came from the world of business, and the majority of general and production managers from the early days of the film industry, then it is certainly the case that the cameramen had at some point in their lives worked as press photographers. And it is to be found that the men who had most to do with the world of journalism, amid the newsreels, were generally among the ranks of the cameramen.

Kenneth Gordon, for example, who was invaluable as a cameraman to Pathé, had intended to take up a career in engineering but started working part-time as a projectionist. From there he served an apprenticeship in photography with Bolak's Press Agency. He was one of the first photographers on the Daily Mirror to use photo-telegraphy. He later joined the Bristol Evening News as a photographic reporter, then worked with the Gaumont Company for King Edward's funeral and King George V's Coronation. He filmed the Delhi Durbar and returned to experiment with early colour processes such as Kinemacolour, Biocolour and Cronochrome. As a photographer in the Balkan War with the Turks, he filmed and took press photographs for the London News Agency and the Illustrated London News. With the advent of the Great War, Gordon joined the army but acted as the official cinematographer on the Royal Tours to the Industrial North in 1917.

11. Kinematograph Year Book, 1937, p.385.

After the Armistice he joined the official newsreel of the Ministry of Information and was a war cameraman with the British North Russian force before finally joining Pathé, for whom he was the staff photographer in Ireland during the troubles.¹²

Either the cameramen came to the newsreels with experience of "photo-journalism", like Gordon, or they came after gaining experience of camera-work for the British Government in the First World War. Jock Gemmell of Pathé Gazette was an example of the latter, having joined the RAF and become a photographic officer, then leaving to work for Topical Budget in May 1919, only to join Pathé in June 1920.¹³ Harold H. Jeapes had left England in December, 1920, to accompany the Duke of Connaught on his Indian Tour as the Official Kinematographer. Jeapes held a similar position for two and a half years with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine, where he filmed the entry into Jerusalem and Damascus, before returning to Universal News.¹⁴

It would appear then that the personnel who made up the staff of the various newsreel companies had very tenuous connections with the realms of journalism, apart from the cameramen who might easily have worked in both fields of reportage at some point in their careers. Yet for all that

12. Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, Vol. 2, December 1936 - January 1937, p.112.

13. Ibid., p.113.

14. Kinematograph Year Book, 1937, p.384.

it is evident "the ethical and professional aspects of newsreel-reporting are the same as those of the Press, and the organisations are also similar."¹⁵ This can be seen from a study of the newsreel operation and process of production.

Certainly it is true to say that the organisation of a newsreel had to be as quick and efficient as Fleet Street was. Gaumont British News, for example, circulated in 1,750 cinemas throughout Great Britain by June 1936. In order to accommodate such a demand it gathered its news from all over the world. They had a cameraman ready to cover local events in every town of importance in Britain. Two tape-machines provided a twenty-four-hour-a-day service in their London office and in addition there was a network of four thousand local correspondents ready to telephone in whenever a story broke. Gaumont British had its own office at Heston Aerodrome with a plane and pilots on permanent stand-by. It had soon perfected a system of air distribution to its cinemas for scoops and specials which enabled a total distance of 1,400 miles to be covered in three hours. Gaumont had twenty seven cameramen and five mobile recording trucks permanently employed by the company.¹⁶ Universal News was the only company not actually in possession of any recording trucks. Universal was financially the poor cousin of the newsreel industry and had never bought any sound equipment for outside coverage, thereby becoming totally

15. Pronay, The Use of Film in History Teaching, p.9.

16. "Aeroplanes and tape machines cover the world for newsreel", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.3, June 1936, p.22.

dependent upon manufactured studio sounds and so losing the opportunity to turn from being Universal Talking News into Universal Sound News.¹⁷

The newsreel companies covered foreign news in a variety of ways. Gaumont, for example, had cameramen available in all of the large continental towns. These freelance "stringers" were paid for the amount of footage they shot which was used by the newsreel company. In America Gaumont had a tie-up with Fox Movietone and the Hearst Newsreel. Since it did not in fact have a complete foreign service of its own, Gaumont got a lot of worldwide pictures via British Movietone and the worldwide service of Movietone of America, in return for which the latter's reel was shown at a percentage of Gaumont cinemas in Britain. Pathé Gazette had of course its own foreign service and was tied with Pathé News of America, with Pathé Journal of France, with UFA, the official German newsreel, with the government newsreel in Russia and with others in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁸ Paramount also had its own world wide organisation. Of course most of the British newsreels also had working arrangements with one or other of the big news agencies such as the British agencies, Reuters, the Press Association, the Exchange Telegraph Co., and Central News, or the American agencies, Associated Press,

17. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1937, p.28.

18. The Commentator "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 1, No. 8, November 1936, p.38.

United Press or International Press.

The hub of any newsreel company was undoubtedly its central office and it was this part which resembled most closely the office of a daily newspaper with its internal arrangements for staff, editorial rooms, caption writers, developing rooms, printing department, editors' rooms, all very much the same as in any Fleet Street office.¹⁹ Generally speaking it was divided into two main departments known as assignment and make-up. It was the assignment or news editor who had to be in closest touch with events in the outside world. It was he who arranged what subjects should be filmed and allocated the work to the cameraman and sound recordist. It was the job of the latter men to journey to the spot where the picture was to be shot, with a sound truck, a motor van which carried the sound recording apparatus including microphone, cameras, cables and all. The assignment editor's job was at its easiest with such stock subjects as the Derby and Wimbledon, which occurred year in and year out at preset times. But of course it was the unexpected happening, the sudden catastrophes and disasters that caused the most trouble, calling for more than a small measure of personal resource and initiative from both assignment editors and, most of all, cameramen. Inevitably the magnitude of such

19. The survey of newsreel production was drawn from correspondence between myself and Roy Drew, formerly an editor with Gaumont British News between 1929 and 1959, as well as the following sources; Thomas Sugrue, "Bringing the world to the world", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.3, June 1937, pp.14-19; William P. Montague, "Eyes of the World", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.11, February 1938, pp.3-5; Stuart Chesmore, Behind the Cinema Screen, London 1934, pp.53-61 and Low Warren, The Film Game, London 1937, pp.145-151.

large organisations as Gaumont British News and indeed the very process of turning raw film into a finished product necessarily meant that a good many people played a part in turning out the newsreels, and it is important for the historian approaching this material now, as archival film, to appreciate that fact.

It can be seen, thus far, that the process of newsreel coverage allowed for a great amount of latitude in the areas of selection and decision making, both on the part of the news editor with regard to what should be covered in the first place, and on the part of the cameraman, with regard to how it should be covered. The limitations upon the cameraman, particularly when covering front line action, which resulted because of the burden of his equipment will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. But the point to be made for the moment is that the film material shot in the field and on location was decidedly subjective in character and thereby influenced the potential value of this archival footage as a source for historical study. On the whole the cameramen did a straightforward job of covering their assignments as best they could, but occasionally the camera's selectivity was obviously enhanced by the location chosen for the shots and by the angles chosen to shoot from. A British Paramount News story for October 18, 1937,²⁰ no longer has any of the original commentary on it, yet for all that it is obvious how, through the choice of camera angles, this film of General Franco holding a youth parade

20. British Paramount Issue No.693, 18/10/37. "Franco holds monster youth parade."

in Burgos goes out of its way to romanticise and even glorify him. The camera is positioned so that, in whatever shots there are of Franco himself, the audience is continually looking up at the dictator. The exoticism, almost Easternness, or the setting and locale is high-lighted strongly and could be sure to evoke a response in a cinema-going generation which came to revel in films with such titles as "Casablanca" and "Morocco". The Moorish troops contained in this issue are found in extravagantly heroic postures and the close-ups of the Franco youth tend to isolate a host of beautiful Spanish girls and well-groomed Spanish men.

Once the first-hand footage was back at the head office it was viewed in negative form by an editor, whereupon what was considered to be the best visual material was immediately selected for possible release, and cut down to a stage where it might comprise one of the eight, ten or twelve stories that together formed an issue with an average length of 850 feet. Where the original sound on the negative was good or where a speech had been recorded it would probably be preserved, but where the original sound did not complement the story it was wiped out and new sound from the library, more sound effects or mood music, would be added to replace it or augment the original. Music could completely change the tone of a newsreel as with a Gaumont story for February 2, 1939,²¹ where the music accompanying

21. Gaumont British Issue No.532, 2/2/39. "Both sides of the war in Spain."

the entry of General Yague's troops into Barcelona is of such a stirring and martial variety as to remove these shots from the realm of reportage and place them within the boundaries of feature film artistry. The drums are rolling as the flags are held aloft, and whilst it is impossible to know for sure what effect such a piece would have had on the audience seeing it at the time, the sequence of shots is so well put together that one's attention and sympathies are engaged even now. Of course such attempts to dramatise a newsreel story could easily lead to over-embellishment, as with a Paramount story for August 17, 1936,²² which has a series of shots of Republican soldiers firing their rifles at the Statue of Christ and His Angels in Madrid, where it is obvious that the soldiers are not in fact firing their rifles at all, yet the sound effects of rifle fire have been laid over their actions. This, together with a commentary to the effect that "you are now about to witness an event that shocked the world", casts such a heavily anti-Christian shadow over the Republican soldiers that one is tempted to wonder how far the whole action may have been staged at the request of the camera team in order to be able to send some good shots back home. Worries such as those expressed comparatively recently by Murray Sayle in the columns of the Sunday Times, regarding television news coverage of the India-Pakistan War, and the subsequent

22. British Paramount Issue No.571, 17/8/36. "Madrid holds out."

correspondence it provoked concerning shelling especially done for the benefit of CBS News men, are by no means new.²³ The newsreel teams were just as capable of asking for similar special effects.

While these sound effects and music were being laid it was the scriptwriter's and commentator's job (sometimes one and the same person) to work hand in hand with the editor to evolve a commentary. Whereupon the edited film would be projected before the commentator whose voice would be piped into a mixing machine, where it joined the other sounds, which were toned down when he was speaking. Meanwhile titles would come from the print shop and such artistic effects as dissolves, wipeouts and double exposures were added, whenever the editor thought necessary. Next to the editor, the commentator and his scriptwriter had the greatest opportunity to influence the outcome of an issue and to determine where its emphasis would lie. Where once "the picture told the story", eventually, after the advent of sound, it became a matter of the commentator "telling" and the picture "illustrating" the most photogenic incidents.

Three British newsreels, Gaumont, Universal and Pathé, used the single commentator technique.²⁴ E.V.H. (Ted) Emmett

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23. Murray Sayle, "When showbiz goes to war", the Spectrum Column, The Sunday Times, January 30, 1972; Edward Behr, "It's war: TV crew opens fire on TV crew", Letters to the Editor, The Sunday Times, February 6, 1972; William McLaughlin, "CBS Principle", Letters to the Editor, The Sunday Times, February 13, 1972.
24. The survey on newsreel commentators was drawn from an interview with Leslie Mitchell, a commentator for British Movietone News between 1937 to 1947 and 1958 to the present, as well as from the following sources; "Personality, the problem of commentary", World Film News Vol. 1, No.5, August 1936, p.22; The Commentator "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.9, December 1937, p.39.

at Gaumont had a style which was light, witty and tongue-in-cheek. Emmett had trained for the stock exchange and joined Gaumont as a cutter in their silent days. He enjoyed one enormous advantage over his rivals in that he controlled the cutting of all Gaumont stories, so that picture and commentary always matched. His voice was on many occasions instrumental in dictating the tone and the mood of a story, as with Gaumont's release for May 6, 1937,²⁵ where a superbly edited story on bombed-out Guernica and a highly emotional commentary from Emmett ending on the line "These were homes once, like yours" managed to point out a decidedly anti-war message. R.E. Jeffry at Universal was not in quite so powerful a position though he was able to write his own scripts. His style was far more homely with its strength in a slow, heavily emphasised, fireside manner. Jeffry had been a pioneer of the British Broadcasting Company where he was better known as Uncle Jeff of Children's Hour. During the course of the Spanish Civil War, Pathé Gazette made use of the heavy, rolling dramatic voice of Roy de Groot, who at 20 joined the B.B.C., and became in turn studio announcer, outside broadcast commentator and programme producer. With his bass voice de Groot was strongest on the drama and tragedy, reportedly putting so much feeling into his description of the funeral of King George V that Pathé News of America released the British version, with his voice on it, in their cinemas throughout the United States.

25. Gaumont British Issue No.350, 6/5/37. "Ruins of Guernica."

Like their American counterparts, Movietone and Paramount used the multi-commentator technique, though the criticism levelled at them over here was that all their voices sounded alike.²⁶ Paramount held rigidly to a policy of complete anonymity for its commentators. Movietone employed a host of commentators including Sir Malcolm Campbell, who made only rare appearances, Eric Dunstan, an ex-B.B.C. announcer and journalist, Leslie Mitchell, an ex-actor whose main job was as B.B.C. announcer (Mitchell is still with Movietone), Ivan Scott, who was also Movietone news editor for a while, and Beryl de Querton, the first newsreel commentator. It was British Movietone news who pioneered the multi-voiced technique and they were very good at letting the scriptwriter have a fair amount of latitude to draft his ideas first, before the negative was cut. However their scriptwriters were not their commentators and once again the criticism was levelled that the latter's voices were simply indistinguishable from one another, because they all reportedly suffered from the B.B.C. "Oxford Accent" syndrome. Indeed there is an anecdote about a Movietone commentator who, on covering the Boat Race for 1937, finally decided to add, much to the delight of one audience, "I expect you realise that I am an Oxford man myself."²⁷ Once again the problems

26. Glen Norris, "A wide open letter to Mr. G.T. Cummings, Editor of British Paramount News", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.5, August 1937, pp.30-31.

27. Glen Norris, "A wide open letter to Mr. Gerald Sanger, Production Chief of British Movietone news", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.6, September, 1937, pp.32-33.

encountered by the newsreels can be seen to predate the problems faced by contemporary television news, in this case over the pronunciation of the English language as spoken by the news-readers.²⁸

None of the British newsreels ever attained the heights of multiplicity reached by their American counterparts where, for example at Movietone, Lew Lehr would always take the comedy stories, Louise Vance the fashions, and the whole issue would invariably be introduced and summarised by Lowell Thomas (with script by his writer Prosper Burnelli); or at Pathé, where Bob Bartlett would cover travel and Clem McCarthy sport. In the States the companies very quickly realised that the personality of a commentator could easily generate a "fan" following.

Generally, though, it was the editor's work on any one newsreel which revealed most about the newsreel coverage of the pressing topics of the day. It is from the array of cinematographic techniques at the disposal of the editor and the purpose for which he used them that it becomes possible to determine how a particular company covered a foreign event such as the Civil War in Spain.

Of course an editor would have at his finger tips not only the footage coming in regularly from his cameramen but also an immense library of stock-shot footage which could

28. Philip Howard, "English as news-readers speak it", The Times, August 17, 1972; J.F.C. Brown, "English as she is spoke", Letters to the Editor, The Sunday Times, September 17, 1972; J.R. Colville, "Correct English", Letters to the Editor, The Times, June 27, 1973.

be used at any time to augment a story. A Universal release for October 8, 1934,²⁹ supposedly covering the Spanish miners' riots in Asturias at the time, is in fact made up entirely of stock-shot footage of riots in Spain from 1932. A Paramount report on October 7, 1935,³⁰ covering the Italians' invasion of Ethiopia, actually goes so far as to introduce some trick war material and feature film footage from America, in order to enhance the point the editor wished to make. A similar piece of editorial manipulation occurs in Gaumont's Spanish story for November 9, 1936.³¹ It purports to show the Fall of Madrid, some two-and-a-half years ahead of time. In his attempt to scoop what was generally felt to be a likely occurrence at the time, the Gaumont editor wrongly, but consciously, ascribes certain shots of General Franco at Burgos, taken some time beforehand, to his supposed arrival as the victor of Madrid.

The potential then for misleading the British cinemagoing public was enormous. It was in the very nature of film to be manipulated, and it was also in the nature of the newsreel organisations and their production process, for everybody and anybody to play a part in this wholesale

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- 29. Universal News Issue No.443, 8/10/34. "Spanish Riots."
 - 30. British Paramount Issue No.481, 7/10/34. "War. Italians invade Abyssinia."
 - 31. Gaumont British Issue No.299, 9/11/36. "The Fall of Madrid."

manipulation of newsreel reportage, should they wish to do so. To suggest that it was possible for the newsreel companies to put forward "a line" on foreign affairs such as the Spanish Civil War, is not necessarily the same as invoking a conspiracy theory on this or any other event. It remains to be discussed whether there was indeed a motive behind the newsreel coverage on Spain.

(e) The Technology and the Technicians

The motion picture industry has always been an industry of rapid technological change, if only in an attempt to capture the attention of the cinemagoing audience of the day by means of passing fads such as cinemascope, vistavision or 3-D. Yet for all that the highly cumbersome nature of the technological means of production has meant that the limitations imposed upon the newsreel cameraman, for instance, have been immense. This factor should not go unheeded by the historian seeking to establish what value the cameraman's use of his camera has had as a means of historical documentation. Two factors remain to be explored within such a realm of study: to what extent was the cameraman limited by his equipment, and, in what ways, if at all, did the political inclinations of the men behind the camera on location affect the outcome of their endeavours.

It has already been seen what means of expression were at the disposal of the editor and producer in the newsreel studio, now it must be seen in what ways the potential for newsreel coverage by the cameraman in the field was curtailed even before it reached the editor's bench. Quite obviously the limitations imposed upon the cameraman manifested themselves, first and foremost, in the shape of the camera, and later the sound equipment, he might use for an assignment.

The requirements of camera design for the newsreel cameraman in particular were simple and straightforward. The first requisite was of course the lens and lens

focusing, for it was a fact that "the poorest lens made, well mounted, will produce a sharper image than the best lens badly mounted."¹ In the world of the newsreel cameraman, speed and accuracy were undoubtedly the essential prerequisites, and this meant that the cameraman had to rely a lot upon his lens scale. The lens itself could not be as accurately focused, if done so visually, as it could if it were well-mounted and also calibrated. One good example of the difference between the two ways was found during 1937 when Pathé announced a few days before the Coronation that they would use a new 56 inch lens.² It had been specially made for them by Taylor Hobson in order to take shots of the King and Queen on the Buckingham Palace balcony from the steps of the Victoria Memorial, a distance of some 400 yards. The results when shown on the screen were disappointing for several reasons. First of all the picture was distinctly unsteady because with such enormous magnification the slightest movement ruined the image. Second the picture was obviously out of focus, a disaster which had been exacerbated by the fact that on this occasion Pathé had used an inexperienced cameraman. Yet when the giant lens was used soon afterwards at the Derby, where it was trained on the Royal Box from the opposite side of the course, the results proved to be more than worthwhile. This time the bulk of the camera and lens

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1. George Hill, "Motion Picture Camera Development", British Kinematography, Vol. 17, No.4, October 1950, p.105.
 2. The Commentator, "Rivalry in Giant Lenses", World Film News, Vol. 2, No.4, July 1937 p.29.

was supported upon a new tripod specially designed for the purpose and the focus was looked after by an accomplished cameraman who did a good job of mounting the camera. Both wobble and focus difficulties were eliminated.

Other such requirements for the newsreel cameraman included a means of focusing and framing up the picture; a means of changing the lenses with the least possible delay (essential for war coverage); magazines which would feed and take up the film, allowing for as much filming as possible, and a synchronous electric motor for sound purposes.

The pioneering manufacturers of all this equipment both in this country and abroad included the names of some of the first actuality and topical cinematographers. Robert W. Paul, who shot the earliest footage of the Derby, was the first engineer in this country to produce cameras for more than simply experimental purposes. He was followed by J.A. Prestwich, Alfred Darling, J.A. Williamson, Moy, Wrench, Arthur Newman, Beck and, later, Vinten. In France the leading makers were Lumière, Debie, Eclair, and Pathé; in America they were Mitchell, Bell and Howell, Akeley and Wall.³ It appears that Germany had little interest until the Second World War in originating camera designs, although some makers did copy models of other makers such as Debie.

The earliest coverage of events like the Boer War was taken by W.K. Dickson and J. Rosenthal for the Biograph

3. Hill, "Motion Picture Camera Development", p.105.

with a Bio-Camera weighing nearly a ton, which perforated the stock at the same time as the film was exposed, and which had to be transported everywhere on a bullock cart. Even earlier Biograph film produced a positive image which had no perforations on it at all and a single frame measured $2\frac{3}{4}$ ins., by 2 ins.⁴ It was Dickson who along with Thomas Edison went on to invent the standard 35 mm. film as we know it today.

The cameras used during these years were hand cranked producing film that ran at 16 frames per second as compared with today's sound speed of 24 frames per second, thereby producing the now familiar jerky impression whenever they are shown on modern projectors.⁵ Pathé used their French model, with outside magazine boxes, Gaumont used the Prestwich, an English model, also with outside boxes.⁶ The advantage to a newsreel cameraman of an outside box for feeding in and taking up the film, as opposed to the side-by-side internal magazine, was that a considerable amount of time was saved because the film could thereby be removed without breaking. Furthermore the advantage in not breaking the film extended to the fact that there was a saving in short ends, not an inconsiderable factor when every shot counted. These cameras were still heavy but not as bad as the old Bio-Cameras

4. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.48.

5. 90 feet of 35 mm film at 24 frames per second will last for 1 minute; 180 feet will last 2 minutes; 270 feet will last 3 minutes, etc.

6. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.48.

since it was at least possible to carry them by means of a strap handle. Moys, Williamsons and Eclairs were also used by the British newsreels before and after the First World War and later Topical Budget used Debries. The Warwick Chronicle was the first newsreel to use an automatic camera to avoid hand cranking and this was the Proszinski Aeroscope which was run by compressed air. The earlier models were also fitted with a gyroscope to keep them steady when held by hand.⁷

Ironically newsreel cameras were just reaching the stage of becoming really lightweight and exceptionally portable, despite the necessity for tripods and film magazines, when the advent of sound and the extra bulk involved in carrying around additional sound equipment arrived on the scene and virtually set the camera crews back to square one. The additional limitations of having to take along sound equipment in a van were immense, since a complete outfit for sound, at the time when the amplifier was attached to a truck, could weigh as much as 1400 lbs. Also the new film speed of 24 frames per second, demanded to extend the range of recorded frequencies, meant a slowing up of processing and added fifty per cent to the amount of material to be handled.⁸ The earliest combined cameras were made by fitting an attachment to a silent motor-driven camera. The physical mobility of the newsreel cameraman was however

7. Ibid.

8. W.S. Bland, "The Development of the Sound Newsreel", British Kinematography, Vol. 17, No.2, August 1950, p.51.

severely curtailed because of such demands.

Sound also brought with it further problems. Where, for example, the newsreel microphone fell short of its studio counterpart was not that it reproduced an inferior quality on news items but that it was so much more prone to the presence of extraneous background noises. The microphones had to be used in all sorts of conditions and the three main sources of interference were background noises, such as general murmuring and traffic, wind on "the mike" and camera noise.⁹ Background noises were unavoidable. They depended on the location of the story but could be reduced to a minimum by careful mike placing, which was only possible of course after considerable experience with various types of stories. Wind on outside coverage was the newsreel engineer's worst enemy and the only way to overcome it was by using a wind shield around the diaphragm of the actual microphone which filtered out such interference but at the same time it also reduced the response of the mike to higher sound frequencies. Noise from the camera itself, generally taking the form of a whirring sound from the motor, was apparent when close-up speeches were being shot. Provided the camera was in first class condition, with no noisy gears, the limit for the distance between subject and camera was generally found to be about 15 feet. This fact alone is sufficient to give some idea of the constraints binding upon newsreel cameramen

9. G.H. Newberry, "Some Aspects of Newsreel Recording" Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, February 1936, pp.85-86.

and sound engineers whilst working in the field. It was not simply a matter of setting up the camera and sound equipment just anywhere and then starting to roll. So many technical factors had to be taken into consideration and so much had to be seen to beforehand, particularly in the case of recorded interviews.

Yet these constraints did not impair the success of the recorded interview. Two good examples of how effective they could be are to be found in the film archive of British Paramount News. Paramount's issue for November 23, 1936,¹⁰ has a story entitled "Premier takes stock, finds Britain best" with a speech by Stanley Baldwin in which he contrasts Britain's improved trade position and general democratic tradition with conditions abroad at the time, particularly in comparison to the chaos and troubles in Spain. Here the cameraman has an easy job for Baldwin is seated at a desk in his study throughout and the conditions for recording are near perfect. Considering the ease of the interview perhaps the cameraman might be faulted for using one face-on view of the Prime Minister all the time. Such a pose was however customary during this period and Baldwin evidently needed simplicity to combat his obvious lack of confidence before a camera.

The second example shows more clearly how successful a camera team could be in the face of adverse conditions and appears in Paramount's issue for February 24, 1938.¹¹

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10. BP Issue No.599, 23/11/36. "Premier takes stock, finds Britain best."
 11. BP Issue No.730, 24/2/38. "Mr. Attlee expresses the views of the Opposition party."

Here Major Clement Attlee expresses the view of the Opposition on Eden's dramatic resignation. The interview is shot in the open air in a park. Despite the fact that traffic noises and wind interference are in evidence, they are kept to a minimum and the cameraman even manages to get in a variety of shots which include a semi close-up and a close-up of Attlee.

By the time of the mid-thirties when the American Mitchell and the Newman Sinclair cameras arrived on the British market, equipment had been much reduced in size until camera and sound together weighed as little as 150 lbs., with most of the weight in the tripod on which the camera rested. But even that imposed many limitations upon the agility of the cameraman on the spot, in addition to which it was only possible with certain cameras to film continuously for a maximum period of three minutes before it became necessary to reload. In fact Kenneth Gordon cites one instance when he was using a Debie "Sept" camera which would only run 15 feet of film at a time. (Some 10 seconds worth.) As Gordon put it: "I managed to get shots of the King inspecting the teams, a fair coverage of the game, and by good fortune the only goal, which was a penalty. Every roll was taken back to the office by a messenger as soon as it was ready."¹² There are many anecdotes about these messengers, motorcyclists whose job it was to bring back the exposed film to the laboratories for processing, with a bounty of £1 for every minute they could cut off half-an-hour by such tricks as speeding round Trafalgar Square on the pavement.¹³

12. Gordon, "The early days of the newsreels", p.50.

13. Norman, "The newsreels", p.10.

Their objective, apart from the pecuniary benefit, was to get the finished product into the cinemas for exhibition as soon as possible.

But Ken Gordon's problems of film supply were by no means as difficult as those of the newsreel cameraman on location. The latitude of choice as to where to position the camera was simply not available to the cameraman who endeavoured to get as near the front lines as possible during time of war. In these instances it was felt to be enough just to get some shots, any shots, as the note which accompanied Pierre Luck's footage on the Spanish Civil War, sent to Fox Movietone, bears witness: "If you find on developing that the negative quality is not up to standard, please forgive me, and take into consideration that a good deal of it was shot under danger of life."¹⁴ When such dangers and limitations were overcome, it provided great jubilation within the company and offered a chance to sell the product to the audience as an unexpected opportunity to witness an event of technological import as with Gaumont's release for March 29, 1937.¹⁵ Alongside a story on British prisoners of war in Spain, there is a story heralding "the first live interview from the trenches in Spain". The issue spends 48 feet of film on the prisoners of war and 66 feet on the interview with a commentator on location, a sign perhaps of where Gaumont felt their priorities should lie, despite the fact

14. Sugrue, "Bringing the world to the world", p.19.

15. GB Issue No.339, 29/3/37. "British Prisoners of War in Spain."

that all the commentator in Spain does is to identify the location and state that there is a battle going on for the adjoining territory. Similarly Gaumont's issue for June 23, 1938,¹⁶ has a story entitled "Zoom Camera", the commentary for which ran as follows:

Gaumont British News never misses an opportunity of going one better than the other fellow, and now once again we are first in the field. We have bought a new thousand guinea lens which performs the functions of a travelling camera without moving from its original position. Gaumont British News is the only newsreel in the world possessing this miracle of equipment. We do this sort of thing partly because we like to be the best, and partly because we can't sleep at night unless we know the exhibitors are happy. We have used this camera for the first time in this current issue, in the story of Helen Wills Moody at Wimbledon.

Despite the technical accomplishment, it is evident from the flippancy of the script that technological advance had normally to be very closely allied with stories of "human interest".

But what of the men behind the cameras? What were their political affiliations? Were they politically committed and, if so, did this fact in any way affect their coverage of the events they were assigned to report?

The years covering the duration of the Spanish Civil War are concurrent with the growth of the Association of Cine Technicians (A.C.T.), which in more recent times has expanded to encompass the new found medium of television,

16. GB Issue No.468, 23/6/38. "Zoom Camera."

thereby becoming the Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians (A.C.T.T.), now undoubtedly the strongest and most vociferous union representing the men in all areas of the cinema industry. But it took quite a while before the union reached its present position of strength whereby anybody working in the film industry has to obtain an ACTT card otherwise he cannot secure employment. The ACT was established in 1933 and a simple table shows its growth in the ensuing years:

December 31, 1933.....98 members.

December 31, 1934.....88 members.

December 31, 1935.....605 members

April 14, 1936.....845 members.

July 31, 1936.....1006 members.¹⁷

By the time of the Third Annual General Meeting of the ACT in May, 1936, it was reported that there were 900 members, representing 670 studio men, 180 laboratory workers and 50 newsreel technicians.¹⁸ By the time of the Fourth AGM, which was held on May 30, 1937, it was reported that there was almost 100% membership of the men on the studio side of the industry and that as of December 31, 1936, there were altogether 1122 members.¹⁹ However, if one considers that there were 10,000 persons normally engaged in film production

17. Journal of the Association of Cine Technicians, August-October, 1936, p.41.

18. Ibid.

19. Journal of the ACT, June-July, 1937, p.68.

in Great Britain,²⁰ it becomes evident that it took some time before membership of the ACT was accepted as the normal course of action by one and all.

The newsreel side of the cinema industry was certainly well represented within the ranks of the ACT and as early as November, 1935, it was decided to form separate sections inside that body to represent its most stalwart support, namely the laboratory and newsreel technicians. The composition of the first committee to represent the newsreel section shows that all of the major newsreel companies were included. It consisted of:

Chairman; Mr. J.G. Gemmell.

Vice-Chairman; Mr. A Tunwell.

Committee; Messrs. F. Bassill and L. Maskell (Pathé); T. Cotter and P. Wyand (Movietone); J. Humphries and R.L. Read (Gaumont); J.F. Gemmell (Paramount); F.E. Miller and F. Wilson (Universal); J. Hodgson (March of Time); H. Starmer and J. Hutchins (Freelance).²¹

Certainly the ACT helped the newsreel side of the industry to marshal its forces more efficiently and with the ACT's help the newsreel section organised the Press Photographers' affiliation and in May 1937 it joined the International Federation of Newsreel Cinematographers.²²

It would appear that on political matters the ACT was divided in its formative years. Certain members of its executive like George Elvin, the general secretary, and

21. Journal of the ACT, February, 1936, p.21.

22. Journal of the ACT, April-May, 1937, p.26.

Ralph Bond would appear to have wanted to push its membership towards the left of the political spectrum. At its Third AGM the ACT did agree to a non-political affiliation with the Trades Union Congress. (Elvin's father was actually President of the TUC at the time.) Yet at the same meeting another successful motion pledged the ACT to pursue its "present policy of allegiance to no one political party".²³ Similarly another motion at the Sixth AGM on April 16, 1939, to affiliate the ACT with the Labour Party was narrowly defeated.²⁴

During the years of the Spanish Civil War, the ACT was therefore prevented from acting as a unified body, with a coherent political commitment, towards any kind of overt action. However this did not prevent their more politically inspired members from making their feelings known as individuals. On the particular matter of the Spanish Civil War this manifested itself in two ways. They offered their technical expertise, for instance, on an unofficial basis to ensure that certain things were made known which might not otherwise have been so. The Journal of the ACT reported that when the first contingent of the British battalion of the International Brigade returned to London, there were no newsreels present to record the event. However several ACT and ETU members banded together, borrowed some film equipment, and filmed the events at Victoria Station for

23. Journal of the ACT, August-October, 1936, p.41.

24. Journal of the ACT, May-June, 1939, p.26.

subsequent private showings at such places as working men's clubs in order to drum up support for the International Brigade Dependents and Wounded Aid Committee.²⁵ It would appear that this action prompted the newsreels into realising what a good story they were missing. The ACT cited the newsreels failure to cover the arrival of the first contingent as "a recent example of the newsreel companies' prejudice overriding news value,"²⁶ which may well be the case for they did display a great deal of bias in their coverage of the British battalion, as will be seen later. But be that as it may, the newsreel companies proceeded to cover the subsequent arrivals of British members of the International Brigade.

Alternatively such ACT support as there was for the Republic in Spain manifested itself in the form of a straightforward declaration of sympathy. Their journal for March-April, 1939, carried a letter, printed in full, from Felipe Pretel, the General Secretary of the Federacion Espectaculos Publicos (The Spanish Entertainment Workers' Union). The letter expressed the determination of his members to fight on. It is prefaced by a short editorial expressing the ACT's solidarity with their fellow workers in Spain and stating that "We can but admire it (the letter) and as trade unionists send our sincere good wishes to our fellow workers in Spain."²⁷ But by the time such sentiments

25. Journal of the ACT, January-February, 1939, p.145.

26. Ibid.

27. Journal of the ACT, March-April, 1939, p.198.

were published Catalonia had fallen, trade unions in that province were a thing of the past, and Republican Spain was on the verge of collapse.

Throughout the years of the Spanish Civil War, the ACT conducted a campaign against censorship of film, not only with regard to the Civil War in particular, but also on the wider issues of both feature film and newsreel censorship and bias. Their campaign was aimed at the British Board of Film Censors, as well as the owners of the feature film and newsreel companies. It culminated in a long article by George Elvin entitled "This Freedom, An Enquiry into Film Censorship"²⁸ where he catalogued what he considered to be the numerous attempts to curtail the freedom of speech in the cinema. He noted that at the 1936 Conference of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association, the Film Censor, Lord Tyrrell, had stated that nothing would be more calculated to arouse the passions of the British cinemagoing public than the introduction on the screen of subjects dealing with religious or political controversy. Elvin recounted that at the time the ACT had taken grave exception to such an attitude and had thereby passed a resolution which stated that while holding:

no brief for any particular political belief whatsoever, it must sternly resist any tendency to deprive those working in the field of cinematography of the right which they should enjoy as British citizens, the right of expression in their chosen field of any view not inconsistent

28. George Elvin, "This Freedom, An Enquiry into Film Censorship", Journal of the ACT, January-February, 1939, pp.141-146.

with the law. The attempt to limit the function of cinematography exclusively to "entertainment" is outside the province and duties of censorship; if successful, it will establish the cinema, per se, as inferior in social value to literature and the other arts, and thereby degrade the status of technicians who devote their lives to it.

The elimination from cinematograph subject material of every controversial question deprives the cinema of the possibility of playing any useful part in the life of the nation, and will have the effect of holding it at that nickelodeon level from which the skill of generations of technicians has raised it to the heights of an art unlimited in potentiality. The underlying assumption that British audiences are incapable of witnessing material with which they disagree without riot is, further, an insult to the British people which, as citizens, the Council of the ACT must strongly repudiate.

On the matter of the newsreels Elvin noted that "The Censor has no control over them. But it is obvious that indirectly, if not directly, very great pressure is at times exercised." Elvin believed:

Part of the trouble is, of course, with the newsreel companies themselves. The majority of their executives are government supporters and their newsreels naturally tend to reflect that fact. (The Honours Lists are beginning to reflect it, too.) It is all the more surprising that when they occasionally give expression to a contrary view for one reason or another the reel is sometimes censored or withdrawn.

His conclusion was:

The newsreel companies should remember they are news reels and not propaganda sheets. They should provide news to appeal to their patrons as a whole and not let their reels be determined by the private interests of their owners or the feelings of officialdom.

The rest of Elvin's article continued to chart instances where he felt that censorship and bias were being exercised, looking in particular at the case of the proposed production of a film called "The Relief of Lucknow". The British Board of Film Censors had let it be known that it was unlikely the film would be granted a certificate since it had been informed by the authorities responsible for the Government of India that such a film could only serve to revive memories of the days of conflict in India.

The next edition of the journal contained a follow-up article to Elvin's under the title "Censored",²⁹ which amassed numerous letters of support that had been received. They included letters from A.J. Cummings of the News Chronicle under the title "Newsreels will lose popular appeal", Geoffrey Mander, MP, under the title "Pro-Fascist Bias", Clement J. Bundock, the General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists, on "Suppression of Inconvenient Criticism", and Ronald Kidd, the Secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, who wrote a letter which was editorialised under the caption "Totalitarian Frame of Mind." But for all the ACT's attempts at making known the full ramifications of censorship in the cinema industry, they still felt the need to raise the subject once again at their Annual General Meeting for 1939 when they broached the matter of the political censorship of newsreels. Mr. C. Tomrley, from the Progressive Film Institute, put forward

29. "Censored", Journal of the ACT, March-April, 1939, pp.202-204.

a motion drawing attention to the tendency towards one-sided political partisanship in certain newsreels. The resolution which was carried unanimously "urged the ACT to support any efforts that may be made towards combating political censorship of the newsreels."³⁰

Surprisingly enough it would appear that there was no attempt to issue any instructions to cameramen going out on assignments to cover the story from any particular political standpoint, nor indeed does there appear to have been any attempt by the cameramen to impose their own political beliefs upon the events they depicted. It will be seen that such political bias as there was really only manifested itself when it came to editing down their material into stories for release and, most of all, when it came to adding the commentary.

For their part the cameramen were just too professional to allow their own personal judgements to interfere with their work. Indeed the image of themselves which they seemed to enjoy most was far removed from the realm of politics and was rather jovially encapsulated in a ditty that went under the title of "Newsreel swindle sheet":

In Bradford she was Mabel,
She was Marjorie in Perth.
In Plymouth she was Phoebe,
The sweetest thing on earth.
In London she was Doris,
The brightest of the bunch,
But down in his expenses,
She was Petrol, Oil and Lunch. 31

30. Journal of the ACT, May-June, 1939, p.27

31. Journal of the ACT, December-January, 1937-1938, p.44.

Chapter 3Outside the Newsreels(a) Exhibition and the Audience

If, as has been argued, the newsreels provided a means of mass communication to the cinema audience on matters adjudged, albeit by the newsreel companies alone, to be of newsworthy interest, then several questions arise with regard to the nature of the audience itself. How big was the cinemagoing audience and what was its social composition? Where did this audience see the newsreels and what was its reaction? It is possible to determine what messages permeated the newsreel stories on such matters as the Spanish Civil War but it is yet another thing to know for certain whether these messages necessarily came across to the audience which saw them. Indeed it would be fair to surmise that for many members of the cinema public the onset of the newsreel provided an opportunity to seek out the usherette in order to buy ices, or for those people who chose to ensconce themselves on the proverbial "back rows" of the cinema, merely a further excuse to indulge in intimacies. Yet if one is compelled to speculate whether the newsreels succeeded in their goal of conveying current affairs to the public, at least it is possible to delve more assuredly into the numbers and social class of the audience. And one can be sure that with their channels of feedback through the cinema managers, the newsreel companies knew who it was that was watching their films.

The Board of Trade published very little in the way

of regular statistics about the cinema industry until 1950. However there are still in existence one or two surveys which were published during the thirties and forties, and which to some extent set about determining the size and nature of the cinemagoing public. For instance Simon Rowson conducted a statistical survey which he collated from two sources of cinema information available for 1934; the yield from the Entertainment Duty and the number of admission tickets sold in the cinemas.¹ His findings are invaluable in providing some answers to both these questions.

From the figures available to him Rowson ascertained that the total number of admissions to all the cinemas in Great Britain for 1934 amounted to some 963 millions, a figure of 18.5 million people per week. Rowson calculated that this total number of paid admissions represented an average of nearly 22 visits to the cinema every year for each man, woman and child in this country.² In order to make this deduction he used the 1931 Census figure for the size of the population, which amounted to 45,090,000 people.³ In fact Rowson went even further to suggest that for persons aged 15 years and upwards, the average worked out at nearly 30 visits per year, and that "If it were possible to eliminate all that portion of the population to whom a cinema is

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1. Simon Rowson, "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol. XCIX, 1936, pp.67-119.
 2. Rowson, "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry", p.70.
 3. Ibid., p.84.

practically inaccessible, either because of distance or for any other reason, it is clear that the average in relation to potential patrons must be a very much higher figure."⁴

However, as Rowson readily admits, it would be incorrect to suggest that every person in Britain went to the cinema on an average of at least 22 times every year. For an important distinction can be drawn between the number of admissions to the cinema in any one year, and the number of persons actually frequenting the cinema. Furthermore it would be wrong to conclude from Rowson's statistics, as one historian has done, that because there were 18.5 million admissions in any one week out of a population of some 45,090,000 people, then there was necessarily 43% of the population going to the cinema weekly.⁵ Such a calculation does not take account of the fact that some people went to the cinema more than once a week, some people went fortnightly, and some people went at longer intervals. Rowson did not tabulate the habits of cinemagoers to such an extent. There were in addition seasonal fluctuations varying from as high as 21.8 million in January to as low as 13.8 million in June when people's recreations quite naturally tended to take them out of doors.⁶ Rowson's statistics simply did not provide enough information to enable one to calculate the actual proportion of the population attending the cinema.

4. Ibid., p.71

5. Pronay, "Audience and Producers", p.412.

6. Rowson, "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry", p.74.

In fact the only definite conclusions which can be drawn from Rowson's survey are that in 1934 there were 4,305 cinemas operating in Great Britain, offering a total of some 3,872,000 seats,⁷ and that during that particular year there were 963 million admissions to those cinemas. But Rowson's findings do give some indication of the kind of audience which frequented the cinema. For he estimated the distribution of cinema admissions with regard to price of seat and location of cinema. He was surprised to find that "43% of the entire cinema admissions are in respect of seats for which the charge last year (1934) did not exceed 7d, inclusive of Entertainment Duty, and this year (1935) did not exceed 6d; and that another 37% paid not more than 1s."⁸ His conclusion was that "Nearly four out of every five persons visiting the cinema pay not more than 1s (including duty) for admission."⁹ In other words the vast majority of the people who did go to the cinema paid to go into the cheapest seats available, either because they wanted to do so or because they could not afford otherwise. Furthermore he calculated that when the distribution of cinemas and cinema seats was compared with the various regional populations, then it was found that there were more seats per person outside of the political, economic and cultural capital than might at first have been expected. For there was one seat

7. Rowson, "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry", p.76.

8. Ibid., p.71

9. Ibid., p.71

to every 9 persons in Lancashire and Scotland, one seat to every 10 persons in the North of England and South Wales, one seat to every 11 persons in Yorkshire and district, one seat to every 12 persons in the Midlands, one to every 13 people in North Wales, one to every 14 in London (postal area) and the Home Counties, one to every 15 in the West of England, and finally one to every 19 in the Eastern Counties.¹⁰ The obvious implication to be drawn from both these sets of figures is that the cinema was most popular among the working class and this fact was borne out in the same year that Rowson began his investigation when the Social Survey of Merseyside was published. For "The Social Survey of Merseyside was one of the many surveys which recorded the extent and the nature of the working class affiliation to the cinema...The manual working class went more frequently than those immediately above them (Register Generals' Groups 4-5) and the professional and upper classes frequented the cinema the least."¹¹

Probably the most useful survey conducted during these years was the one entitled The Cinema Audience.¹² For all that it was made during the Second World War, at a time of social upheaval and disruption, its findings only served to confirm the results of the earlier surveys. Indeed to judge from this Wartime Social Survey, which was made for the Ministry of Information, it would appear that very little had

10. Ibid., p.84

11. Pronay, "Audience and Producers", pp.413-414.

12. The Wartime Social Survey, The Cinema Audience, London 1943, pp.1-24.

changed in the intervening years from 1934 to 1943, and that if anything a period of war only accentuated the prevailing trends in cinemagoing habits which obtained during a period of peace.

The Wartime Social Survey acknowledged its aims in the service of propaganda by stating that "The cinema is an important publicity medium in war time and it is, therefore, desirable to know what sort of people go to the cinema and how often they go."¹³ But because it was conducted during wartime there were several limitations imposed upon this survey. To begin with it was based upon a sample of only 5639 people who were interviewed during the months of June and July for 1943. The method of approach to the survey was different from the one adopted by Rowson. For 5639 men and women were interviewed by means of a questionnaire and they were selected in representative proportions from different regions and occupation groups. But because the interviews were held during what were generally considered to be quiet months by the cinema trade, there is every reason to believe that the findings might be down in numbers in comparison to other months of the year. This factor should however be balanced by the fact that people would appear to have frequented the cinema more often in time of war than they otherwise might have done in time of peace. Only civilians were included in the survey in order to compensate for this factor.

13. Ibid., p.1.

The survey found that the cinema was an important form of recreation for one third of the adult civilian population who went once a week or more often. A further 12% went to the cinema once a month or once a fortnight and 26% went less frequently. But 30% of the population did not go to the cinema at all during the summer months.¹⁴ In other words 70% of adult civilians sometimes went to the cinema during the months of June and July in 1943, and 32% went once a week or more often.

The survey then proceeded to analyse the numbers that did go by economic groups, by education and by occupation. Here once again the results are revealing for they show that the lower economic groups and those with only an elementary education went more often to the cinema than the higher economic groups and those with a higher education. The lower group was classified as earning a wage rate of £5 or less per week, and as having experienced only an elementary education with no secondary, technical or university education.¹⁵ The analysis by occupation revealed that relatively high proportions of factory workers, clerical and distributive workers went to the cinema more than once a week whereas managerial and professional workers went less often.¹⁶ Furthermore, as is only to be expected, town dwellers went to the cinema more than people living in the country, due in no small part to the access and availability of cinemas.

14. The Wartime Social Survey, The Cinema Audience, p.3.

15. Ibid., pp.6-7.

16. Ibid., pp.8-9.

More people went to the cinema in the North, North West, the Midlands and Scotland than did so in the South East, South West and East Anglia.¹⁷

Finally the survey compared the average cinema attendances per month with those people among the sample who saw a morning newspaper, bought a weekly or monthly magazine about matters of public interest, or bought a small book. Here it found that the cinema reached appreciably more people than did the other media of public communication, particularly in the lower income group.¹⁸

The overall conclusions which were drawn by the Wartime Social Survey bore out the implications that were inherent in Rowson's survey and more besides. There were considerable numbers of people going to the cinema each week and these people were for the most part from the working class. There can be little doubt that the newsreel companies were also aware of these facts without any recourse to social surveys. And there can be even less doubt that they went out of their way to ensure that as often as there was a cinema programme on offer for this large audience, then there would also be a newsreel as part of that programme.

When a newsreel was ready for release about 200 copies would be made for distribution, each of which was expected to be seen in four or five cinemas. Each newsreel would cost £10 to rent for its first three day run, and the cost would then decline as the news became stale, so that by the

17. Ibid., p.9.

18. Ibid., p.22.

time the film reached a small cinema, two weeks or more later, it would cost only £3. After that the reels were recalled and destroyed, except for one copy which was filed in the company's library.¹⁹ But during that time the newsreels had more than likely reached all of the cinemas in the country for by 1936 it was an accepted phenomenon that a newsreel formed part of virtually every cinema's programme.

Gaumont British News and the Pathé Gazette were backed by Britain's two largest cinema chains and they were also affiliated to the two main renters. The Gazette was distributed by Wardour-Pathé and shown in the cinemas owned by the Associated British Picture Corporation. In 1933 this organisation ran only 147 cinemas,²⁰ but by the autumn of 1936 the circuit strength of A.B.P.C. had risen to 296 cinemas.²¹ At the beginning of 1937 that figure further increased to 314 cinemas and by October 1937 it had control of over 450 cinemas.²² The Pathé Gazette would undoubtedly have been shown in all these cinemas at the very least.

The Gaumont British News was distributed in 1936 by Gaumont British Distributors but in March, 1937, Gaumont handed over all its distribution facilities to General Film Distributors who proceeded to distribute the Gaumont News along with the Universal News.²³ The Gaumont newsreel was

19. Chesmore, Behind the Cinema Screen, p.61.

20. P.E.P., The British Film Industry, p.56.

21. Ibid., p.66.

22. Ibid., p.67.

23. Ibid., p.70.

shown in most but not all of the Gaumont cinemas. In 1933 this amounted to a chain of 287 cinemas,²⁴ but by the autumn of 1936 this figure had expanded to 305 cinemas.²⁵ It should be remembered however that because Gaumont took a lot of film from the British Movietonews foreign service, in return the latter's newsreel was shown at a proportion of Gaumont cinemas, although it is known precisely how many cinemas were involved in the deal.

However by 1939 these two leading circuits of cinemas had been joined by a third, the Odeon chain. Even then it is noticeable that all three organisations still only accounted for 1,011 cinemas, amounting to about 21% of the total number in operation.²⁶ The remaining 79% of cinemas in Britain consisted of smaller chains or of independently owned cinemas. Gaumont, Pathé, Universal, Paramount and Movietonews were in constant competition to ensure that as many independent cinemas as possible took their product. Because these private cinemas changed their minds regularly about which newsreel they wished to purchase, and because new deals were constantly being made, it is impossible to ascertain the exact circulation figures for each of the newsreels over a long period. But it was reported that in June, 1936, the Gaumont newsreel was reaching 1,750 cinemas,²⁷ and that by January, 1938, Universal News had the highest circulation score with Gaumont second

24. Ibid., p.56.

25. Ibid., p.66.

26. Ibid., p.80.

27. World Film News, Vol. 1, No.3, June 1936, p.22.

and Pathé third.²⁸ Evidently all five newsreels had enough of a circulation to merit some kind of success for as one cinema manager put it: "There's always been room for five".²⁹ Certainly it is the case that by 1952 all 4,755 cinemas in operation in this country took one or other of the five newsreels which were still on offer.³⁰

The obvious popularity of the newsreels was perhaps best shown by the fact that from the early 1930's onwards special cinemas began to appear which were devoted exclusively to exhibiting newsreels, cartoons and other topical films, in a programme generally amounting to somewhere between 50 minutes and 1 hour in length. The prices of admission to these cinemas were 6d between midday and 4 p.m., and 1s between 4 p.m. and 11 p.m. On ~~Sundays~~ they were open from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. By December, 1933, there were nine such theatres and that year also saw the opening of two railway station news theatres at Victoria and Waterloo, both of which were designed by Alistair MacDonald, the then Prime Minister's son.³¹ The news cinema at Victoria Station was hailed as a triumph in construction design. It had been built during the night in order to interfere as little as

28. World Film News, Vol. 2, No.10, January 1938, p.37.

29. World Film News, Vol. 1, No.8, November 1936, p.38.

30. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, p.88.

31. Fraser, "Newsreel, Reality or Entertainment?", p.89; Norman J. Hulbert, "News films and their public", Sight and Sound, Winter 1933, p.133.

possible with the normal activities of the station and special provision had been made for sound insulation since the theatre was suspended in mid-air within the station, with traffic passing under the floor or the auditorium. The double entrance formed an archway between platform 16 and Buckingham Palace Road. There was a small illuminated panel near the screen giving ten minutes notice of the arrival and departure of the principal trains.³²

Such cinemas proved to be immediately successful and by 1936 London had 18 news theatres seating somewhere between 300 and 500 people, and there were other news cinemas in Manchester, Brighton, Leeds, Chester, Southampton, Sheffield and Bournemouth.³³ The cinema at Bournemouth revelled in the glorious name of The Bijou. In the same year the Pathé Gazette was actually shown on the railway route from London to Leeds, in a special projection carriage, and it was later introduced by the L.N.E.R. on the London to Leeds to Newcastle to Edinburgh route.³⁴ In fact it would appear that the news theatres managed to secure a clientele who would otherwise not have been disposed to visit the cinema at all, and cinemas such as the Tatler, the Cameo and the Monseigneur, all in the Charing Cross Road, attracted a regular stream of customers. The Gaumont-Movietone attracted as many as six

32. "The Cinema: A Symposium", with a forward by Sidney Bernstein, and including "The Newsreel Theatre" by A.G. MacDonald, in The Architects Journal, No.7, 1935, pp.657-718.

33. Sight and Sound, Winter 1936-1937, p.119.

34. Sight and Sound, Spring 1937, p.4.

million people in eight years.³⁵ Norman Hulbert, a Member of Parliament for Stockport and a member of the London County Council, was the managing director and chairman of the Capital and Provincial News Theatre Chain, the largest newsreel theatre circuit. And in 1936 he was sufficiently optimistic about their future as to express the hope that "The day will come when every town with a population of 50,000 or more will have a newsreel theatre".³⁶ But the advent of war and the subsequent emergence of television on a large scale meant that the total number of news cinemas probably never exceeded their 1952 peak of 35 theatres.³⁷

The evident demand for newsreel theatres was one means, albeit less than satisfactory, of judging the popularity of the newsreels themselves. Unfortunately very little was done in the way of surveys to establish what effects the newsreel had upon the audiences viewing them. There was certainly nothing done in this country during the thirties to equal the research conducted in America through the Motion Picture Research Council and sponsored by the Payne Fund. For all that their twelve volumes of results only dealt with the effects of film upon children, they were nevertheless invaluable in establishing the methods by which such surveys might set about achieving their objectives.

35. J. Neill-Brown, "The Industry's Front Page", Journal of the A.C.T., March-April, 1939, p.199.

36. World Film News, Vol. 1, No.4, July 1936, p.42.

37. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, Newsreels Across the World, p.89.

The only surveys conducted in Britain before 1939 that remotely approached the Payne Fund Studies were the annual popularity polls among both adults and children which were instigated by Sidney Bernstein purely as a business venture. Bernstein wanted to find out what was most popular among the cinema audiences in order that he might then book these films for his cinema chain. The results were far from satisfactory. As World Film News commented at the time:

Sidney Bernstein's famous questionnaire goes out again this month. It will ask the members of his audiences in eighteen theatres what stars, directors, types of film and programme they prefer. A quarter of a million questionnaires will be issued, and half of them will be returned. They will tell us the taste of Suburbia.

The results we expect will not differ greatly from last year, except in the names of the stars of the moment. Some stars will be up, some down. But thriller-adventure, musical-comedy and comedy will be preferred by the men, and musical comedy and society drama preferred by the women. Comedy will continue to be low on the female list.³⁸

However, from 1939 and throughout the course of the Second World War, Mass Observation was to show that there might well be a great difference between the verbal responses, as publicly manifested in popularity polls, of an audience and the private response as evinced during the actual exhibition of a film in the cinema. They noted, for example:

Watching audience responses in cinemas gives the same sort of information about what is really going on in people's minds as we get from intimate

38. "Public to gauge film values", World Film News, Vol. 1, No.2, May 1936, p.20.

war diaries, or dream studies. For instance, while public opinion polls and press letter-bags showed a heavy increase in Chamberlain's popularity after the beginning of the war, and while this popularity was superficially maintained until within a few days of his resignation, newsreel observation showed a steady and accelerating decline in favourable audience response whenever he appeared on the screen, though it is the "done thing" to be loyal to your Prime Minister in public, especially in wartime. Similarly, direct opinion testing would always show a big hand for the King. But in the early months of the war, newsreel (and other) studies showed that his popularity was at a low ebb.³⁹

Even at the level of direct opinion testing it would appear that from the onset of war the newsreels suffered a sharp decline in credibility, perhaps because they were now for the most part reporting events which the audiences were enduring for themselves under stress. The newsreel audiences were therefore able to evaluate their own response in comparison with the portrayal of events as depicted in the cinema. Evidently it was felt that the newsreel coverage simply did not match up to the events themselves, for Mass Observation found:

At the end of 1939 just under two-thirds of all persons asked said they liked newsreels, and expressed sentiments distinctly favourable to them; by August, 1940, only just a quarter of those questioned held this point of view. In 1939, 12% spontaneously criticised newsreels for having no news; in 1940, 35% spontaneously made this criticism.

The investigators, the questions, the areas and class proportions were the same each time; and the questioning was spread over several weeks

39. Tom Harrisson, "Social Research and the Film", Documentary News Letter, Vol. 1, No.11, November 1940, p.11.

in order to avoid the dominant influence of any one newsreel. A whole wealth of criticism was revealed, some of it very unfair to the newsreel companies. At the same time, we have found repeated cases where the newsreels have alienated people by their political bias, by their treatment of emotional topics, by the commentaries (which are often unsympathetic to ordinary people), and have shown by numerous indications that they are sometimes out of touch with the feeling of the moment and even, sometimes, with the permanent feelings of housewives or labourers.⁴⁰

Of course there was, even in its day, a good deal of criticism about the methods by which Mass Observation conducted its research. Ewart Hodgson, the film critic of the News of the World, raised some very important questions when he asked:

To be assured that Mass Observation is of any value at all, there are three questions which need to be answered.

1. What is the method of selection and of training a Mass Observer?
2. How, and through what body scientifically concerned with psychology, do they qualify for their jobs of accurately observing and recording public opinion and behaviour?
3. What are Mr. Harrison's own qualifications for the publishing of generalisations arrived at from the perusal of his Observers' statistics? In his essays individual comments are often used as the basis for a generalisation.⁴¹

But then nobody was more aware of the problems involved in audience research and the inevitable shortcomings of their

40. Harrison, "Social Research and the Film", p.11.

41. Ewart Hodgson, "Mass Observers", Documentary News Letter, Vol. 2, No.1, January 1941, p.12; Tom Harrison replied to this criticism in a letter on page 13 of the same edition of Documentary News Letter; for further criticism of Mass observations techniques see W. Buchanan-Taylor, "Mass Observation", D.N.L., Vol. 2, No.2, February 1941, p.35; and the subsequent rebuttal by Harrison in D.N.L., Vol. 2, No.3, March 1941, p.49.

findings than Mass Observation. Harrisson appreciated that a lot of the success of his venture depended upon the methods they employed for measuring audience response. As he readily admitted the conditions under which his observers worked were far removed from the laboratory:

Observer variation, the rapid sequence of film events, the difficulty of getting scripts as a check on observation, and the darkness in which the observer must write and record, are all difficulties.⁴²

Furthermore Harrisson always went out of his way to point out that "These results have no absolute validity, but a comparative value."⁴³ And it is therefore at the comparative level that Mass Observations' wartime findings must be understood. It is at the comparative level that Mass Observation showed the newsreels to be lacking in popularity and credibility during a time of war. But when once the war was finished, it is noticeable that the newsreels regained a fair amount of their lost prestige. For a Bernstein questionnaire conducted among children in 1947 revealed that there was a new generation coming into existence which, once again, appeared to consider the newsreels to be popular. One question was asked of the young audience, "Do you like newsreels?", and the results can be tabulated as follows;⁴⁴

42. Harrisson, "Social Research and the Film", p.11.

43. Ibid.

44. The Bernstein Questionnaire for Children, 1947, as reprinted in Winchester's Screen Encyclopedia, London 1958, pp.371-372.

	All replies	Boys	Girls	
Yes	71	76	61	%
No	28	23	38	
No reply	1	1	1	

Age analysis.

	Both sexes								
	Under 8	8	9	10	11	12	13	14 plus.	
Yes	63	70	70	72	71	74	78	74	%
No	36	29	29	27	28	25	22	25	
No reply	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	

Boys

Yes	65	76	76	77	77	81	85	86	%
No	33	24	23	22	22	18	15	12	
No reply	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	

Girls

Yes	56	60	56	64	61	64	68	58	%
No	43	39	43	35	39	35	32	42	
No reply	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	

Bernstein's questionnaire showed that the newsreels were liked by 76% of boys but only 61% of girls and that in both cases their interest increased with age.

In the final analysis then it would appear that what finally killed off the newsreels as a viable form of communication on matters of public interest was not so much a loss of popularity in the newsreels themselves, but more the emergence of television as a means of putting the news before the public that much quicker. Apart from a brief period during the Second World War, the newsreels had apparently succeeded in capturing the attention of the cinemagoing public in sufficient quantity as to make them a popular form of mass communication.

(b) Newsreel Content

If one were to judge the content of the newsreels in the thirties from the opinions purveyed by critics on that same subject, then one might well expect to find very little of value to the historian in the coverage of an event such as the Spanish Civil War. Sir Arthur Elton's comment that "for at least the first thirty years the content of the newsreels was determined mainly by passing fads and fancies of the time" has already been noted. But Elton's comments were made in 1955 and with the apparent benefit of hindsight. What was the opinion on newsreel content in its day? In fact it appears to be unanimous in its condemnation. Terry Ramsaye, a respected film critic, commented in 1934:

The newsreel is not a purveyor of news and is never likely to become one...Whether they know it or not, the newsreels, as they call them, are just in the show business.¹

A similar comment was forthcoming from the film producer Emanuel Cohen when he said of newsreel content:

What kinds of pictures are most popular with audiences? Soldiers, airplanes, battleships and babies.²

Of course both these speakers were Americans and were obviously referring first and foremost to their home grown product. However it seems that the situation was not considered to be any better in this country for in 1937,

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1. As quoted in Fielding, The American Newsreel, p.226.
 2. Ibid., p.227.

John Grierson, the father of the British documentary movement, observed:

From the beginning we have had newsreels, but dim records they seem now of only the evanescent and the essentially unreal, reflecting hardly anything worth preserving of the times they recorded....The newsreel has gone dithering on, mistaking the phenomenon for the thing in itself, and ignoring everything that gave it the trouble of conscience and penetration and thought.³

Nor can the charge be levelled at Grierson that simply because he had such a strong interest in the documentary film movement, he therefore felt less kindly disposed to a rival in the field of actuality and reportage such as the newsreel. For the condemnation of newsreel content was virtually universal among film critics and commentators, and articles with titles such as "Are newsreels news?"⁴ were all too frequently found in the film journals and magazines. But did the newsreels necessarily deserve such wholehearted condemnation? Perhaps one answer to that question can be found in an article entitled "Newsreels or real news?", written by another British film producer, Andrew Buchanan, who was also strongly critical of newsreel content. Buchanan elaborates upon his points of attack when he says:

With the rapid development of the documentary picture, those interested in non-fictional production are increasing their criticism of the newsreel, primarily because it presents

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3. John Grierson, Grierson on Documentary, London 1966, p.201.
 4. "Are newsreels news?", The Nation, October 2, 1935, p.369.

the greatest output of "actuality" on the screen. Nevertheless newsreel material is inadequate and cannot be regarded as a contribution to documentary production. This is lamentable for films dealing with reality are so rare that one would have welcomed the opportunity of being able to categorise newsreel material under the dignified and important heading, Documentary. In fact if, in the beginning, the newsreel had been made intelligently, it would have expedited the evolution of the documentary, which would in turn have influenced the methods of fictional production.⁵

The major point which emerges from such an extract is the comparison that is drawn between a supposedly respectable documentary film movement and an allegedly disreputable newsreel film movement. This comparison occurs over and over again throughout the critical articles on the newsreel for the period, and indeed one can understand why. The documentary film movement as initiated in this country by Grierson and his band of talented directors at the Empire Film Board first of all, then at the General Post Office Film Unit, had won a great and deserved reputation for the British film industry in general. World film output had shown that the British film industry could not begin to compete in the realm of feature film production, either for standards or for sales. But with the advent of the documentary film, Britain had shown that she could rival the likes of America and France, and indeed lead the way. The documentary film was the first and probably the only example of a national cinema movement emanating from within

5. Andrew Buchanan, "Newsreels or real news?", Film Art, Vol. 3, No.7, 1935, p.22.

the British film industry and in retrospect it has proved to be its sole contribution so far to the history of the world cinema. Inevitably the newsreel was held up in comparison to it, simply because on the surface they both appeared to be dealing with the same kind of material, actuality film. So it was that Andrew Buchanan felt compelled to go on and state:

I see no reason why the best creative brains in filmdom should not be concentrated upon the production of the real newsreel, so that it shall be a first class documentary production with a topical flavour.⁶

Yet unwittingly Buchanan had put his finger upon the major cause of the dilemma. For it is interesting to note that there was never any duplication of personnel between the documentary and newsreel sides of the film industry. The reason is because they were fulfilling completely separate functions under entirely different conditions of work. The basic problem of time which confronted the newsreels demanded that news was covered while it was still "hot" and the necessary speed which was essential in getting the final product to the exhibitors precluded a lot of the "art" that might ordinarily go into the making of a documentary. The documentary film-makers were first and foremost artists and poets, despite Grierson's statements to the contrary. By comparison, the newsreel makers were film "journalists". Furthermore too much was made by the critics

6. Ibid., p.23.

of the supposed capacity for "realism" inherent in the documentaries. Certainly it is true that with such films as "Drifters", Grierson paved the way for the use of amateurs playing themselves without the "benefits" of a feature film actor's expertise and dramatic training. Also it is true that the documentary makers sometimes used "everyday people in everyday settings". But for all that what made the success of a film like "Night Mail" was the additional efforts of acknowledged artists such as W.H. Auden and Benjamin Britten, wedded together with the sort of clever editing which demands a lot of time, and the sort of studio help which simply did not come the way of the newsreels. The claim to "realism" is also undermined by the recent revelations from Paul Rotha concerning the production of "Drifters". For he reveals that to make this film a drifter, the Maid of Thule, was hired at Stornoway "chiefly on the strength of the crew's supposed photogenic quality". In fact the words are not Rotha's at all, but were drawn by him from a source attributable to Sir Stephen Tallents, Grierson's mentor, all of which goes on to show just how fabricated the "realism" of this film was. The interior scenes, for instance, were shot on a cabin set designed by the sculptor, John Speaping, which was erected near the harbour. A fisheries protection cruiser provided the power for the interior lighting. The underwater shots were supplied with film of dogfish chivying small roach around a tank at the Plymouth Marine Biological Station. Then when shooting on location started, the Maid of Thule simply could

not find any herrings and all the operations had to be transferred to a completely different drifter which was fishing off Lowestoft.⁷

In reviewing Rotha's book the film producer and critic, Stuart Hood, has suggested that a phrase originally coined by Arthur Calder-Marshall would better serve to describe the efforts of Grierson's film-makers. For in calling them "false-to-life, true-to-life documentaries" one is getting closer to the point. Furthermore as Hood goes on to explain, the documentary films simply replaced one set of feature film stereotypes with a new set of documentary film stereotypes. The ease with which this new set of stereotypes was then taken up and assimilated into the feature film industry adequately reveals the comparative hollowness at the heart of the documentary claims for "realism". This was shown most of all when the Second World War ensued and engaged the documentary men as part of "a propaganda machine, which accepted the most reactionary mythologies about British life and dealt with stereotypes of the cheerful Cockney, of the West Countryman and the Scotsman."⁸

It was a characteristic also noticed by Charles Barr who pinpointed the ease with which certain directors progressed quite logically from documentary shorts, to "dramatised" documentary, to the more orthodox story films in his masterly study of the Ealing Studios. He is speaking in

7. Paul Rotha, Documentary Diary, London 1973, p.27.

8. Stuart Hood, Review of Documentary Diary by Paul Rotha, Sight and Sound, Vol. 43, No.1, 1973/1974, p.58.

particular of men such as Alberto Cavalcanti, Harry Watt and Robert Hamer, and the reasons for the course which they took is summarised by Barr when he says:

There was no special political or aesthetic rigour in the documentary tradition which created a barrier to its easy assimilation by a commercial studio. The social/political outlook was less than radical. Nor had a firm anti-theatrical acting tradition been formed. Perhaps the main influence was in the area of: location shooting, editing techniques, sober narratives.⁹

Perhaps it was Grierson's own aversion to "art", and all the pretensions which the word connotes, that made him put forward his ideas on documentary as being "the creative interpretation of reality". Clearly, in the light of what is now known about the documentary film movement, and its methods of production, Grierson's definition needs to be re-assessed. It is equally as clear that to demand, as many contemporary critics did, that newsreel follows in the footsteps of the documentary, is to completely misunderstand the role which the newsreels played and the conditions under which they worked. For they fulfilled a completely different function.

However such an argument can by no means dismiss outright the many criticisms of newsreel content during the decade from 1930. It is easy to suggest that the critics were making a mistake in comparing newsreel content with documentary content, and misunderstanding the nature of documentary at that. But such a course of action does not

9. Charles Barr, "Projecting Britain and the British Character: Ealing Studios", Part I, Screen, Vol. 15, No.1, Spring 1974, p.97.

as easily dispense with the basic criticism that the newsreels were still for their own part trivial. The Arts Enquiry on The Factual Film probably encapsulated such criticism best of all when it noted:

The usual content of the majority of pre-war British newsreels was trivial, being largely devoted to reports of minor events such as the laying of foundation stones, society weddings, traffic jams on the main roads at holiday seasons, ship-launchings and all the main sporting events. Material from overseas was usually similar in character.¹⁰

The only way to answer the criticism that the newsreels dealt with trivial subjects is by an analysis of the newsreel releases during the period. There are already in existence two surveys of the period under review, although they both refer to the content of the American newsreels. However an examination of their results is valuable in order to determine what methodology must be applied in surveys of this sort and how best they can be used. For only then can one determine what likelihood there was of something like the Spanish Civil War being covered and how well one might expect it to be reported.

The first survey was made by Edgar Dale and published in 1935 as part of a comprehensive review for the Payne Fund Studies on The Content of Motion Pictures. The purpose of his research with regard to newsreel is best expressed in his opening remarks to the chapter where he states:

10. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.140.

The newsreel is a device by means of which the population can be made intelligent about the events which are current in this complex and changing world in which we live. How does the newsreel measure up to the ideal which has been set up for it? The analysis here presented attempts to answer these questions.¹¹

Dale's method of enquiry appreciated that each event or "item", as he called it, within any newsreel release, was an entity in itself. Each one of these items or stories had a certain amount of film ascribed to it, which did not necessarily bear any relation to the topic that preceded or followed it. And in order to determine precisely what topics and current events these items covered Dale decided to use the synopsis sheets of newsreel companies instead of analysing the newsreel themselves at the cinema. Furthermore he confined his analysis to only two newsreel companies, although he never actually states their names but simply designates them as being X and Y.

The X newsreel was studied from the period April, 1931, to June 1932, a period of 59 weeks thereby providing a set of 118 synopsis sheets, since there were two newsreel issues in every week. The Y newsreel was studied from August, 1931, to June, 1932, for 44 weeks with a total of 87 synopsis sheets. Thus, altogether, it can be seen that the period from August, 1931, to June, 1932, was covered by both these particular newsreels, whereas the months of April, May, June and July in 1931 were covered by one newsreel alone, the X reel.

11. Edgar Dale, The Content of Motion Pictures, first printed New York 1935, reprinted New York 1970, p.189.

Certain other factors should be borne in mind with regard to Dale's method of approach which decidedly lessen its potential value. First of all he states that while the X reel gave the footage of each and every particular item or story, the Y reel did not do so. Therefore it is impossible to ascribe any importance, in Dale's analysis, to the length of individual stories, or to the relative importance which a story might gain by comparing its length with the length of other stories. In fact Dale does not even ascribe any merit to the position a story might occupy within a newsreel release. He fails to appreciate that the opening and closing positions in a newsreel issue were generally believed by the newsreel trade to be the more important slots. It will be seen that length and position of newsreel stories are factors which are both considered to be important in the detailed study, which follows later, of the British newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War.

It is worth citing at this point two examples which Dale gives of stories from the synopsis sheets under his consideration for they reveal further limitations:

X Newsreel

"2-Gun" Slayer Caught In Desperate Battle
With Army of Police.
New York, N.Y. Sought as the murderer of a
policeman and a dance hall hostess, Francis
Crowley puts up fight reminiscent of wild
west before ammunition gives out and tear
gas bombs bring his surrender.
Rudolph Durringer, accused of one killing,
and Helen Walsh, 16-year old girl, taken with
him.

Y Newsreel

Japanese Bombs Create Havoc In Shanghai. Y News gives you a vivid picture of the devastation in the leading city of China in additional films rushed from the Orient by fast steamer and air-plane. These are the first sound pictures from the war zone made in the midst of the Chinese counter attack which retarded the Japanese advance.¹²

It can be seen immediately that a study of this sort, depending as it does upon the synopsis sheets alone, and with no viewing of the material, either in private or public, would be of little value should the investigator wish to extend his survey into the realms of presentation on a particular topic or into bias of depiction. However within the bounds which Dale sets himself for his research, they are valuable, for the synopsis sheets do give a good idea of what constituted a story in content alone and of what subject it dealt with.

Dale then proceeds to classify the stories under subject headings. His intention was to adopt what he called a "common-sense" classification and to make certain divisions which might make it possible to answer some important questions that he felt should be asked of newsreel content. These questions were:

Is more attention given to war than peace?
Are current economic conditions being treated in newsreels? Is there a tendency for crime news to be included? Are bathing girls shown more frequently than government officials? Are religious activities ever treated? What does the newsreel show us of the drama of modern industry?¹³

12. Dale, The Content of Motion Pictures, pp.190-191.

13. Ibid., p.191.

The classifications Dale established to probe into these topics can be summarised as follows:

1. Accidents, fires, storms, wrecks and disasters.
2. Animals, birds, fish and insects.
3. Aviation. (Civil)
4. Beauty contests.
5. Celebrities.
6. Children and their activities.
7. Commerce, transportation and industry.
8. Conventions, reunions, contests, parades, festivals and pageants.
9. Curiosities and freaks.
10. Dancing.
11. Economic conditions.
12. Educational and instructive.
13. Engineering and scientific marvels and inventions.
14. Entertainment.
15. Explorational adventure.
16. Fashion shows.
17. Government and civic officials.
18. Governamental-political-civic. (Activities)
19. Music.
20. Police and criminal activities.
21. Prohibition and liquor.
22. Religion.
23. Scenic splendours.
24. Sports.

25. War-army-navy.

26. World peace.¹⁴

The one thing that Dale's twenty-six categories did not allow him to determine, however, was just how much foreign coverage there was in either of the two American newsreels he was investigating. So he conducted a preliminary survey in order to ascertain the frequency of appearance of foreign items in the two newsreels. The results were tabulated in the form of a table:

Table 1: Frequency of appearance of foreign items in newsreels.

(The number and percent of reels and of items which dealt with foreign countries and with the United States)¹⁵

Type of locale	Reels				Different items.			
	X		Y		X		Y	
	Num- ber	Per cent	Num- ber	Per cent	Num- ber	Per cent	Num- ber	Per cent
Foreign	99	84	81	93	188	20	168	22
United States	118	100	87	100	764	80	604	78
Total	118	100	87	100	952	100	772	100

The results are very revealing for they show that stories on foreign topics appeared in 99 out of the 118 newsreel releases for the X reel, and that foreign items appeared in 81 out of the 87 releases of the Y reel. The second half of the table indicates that out of a total of 952 stories

14. Ibid., pp.192-197

15. Ibid., p.199.

contained in all the 118 releases for the X reel, some 188 or 20% were on foreign topics; and that of the sum total of 772 stories in the 87 releases for the Y reel, there were 168 or 22% on foreign topics. As Dale concluded: "We see, therefore, that the newsreel is by no means provincial. It does deal to a significant extent with foreign countries and peoples."¹⁶

But it was Dale's second survey which attempted to quantify the subject matter contained in the newsreels, utilising the classification headings summarised earlier. And here the results prove to be even more interesting. The first point to be made about Dale's findings in Table 2 is that there is a strong degree of correlation between the two newsreels he studied with regard to the ranking according to the frequency of topics. In fact the rank correlation is plus .54 showing that to a great extent these two newsreels agreed upon what they believed the spectator should see. Sports news is the most frequent in both newsreels. Perhaps it is because of this fact that the critics of the newsreel felt it was basically trivial in content. But then it is easy to understand the feeling on the part of the newsreel companies that the public enjoyed seeing sport on the screen, and of course it should not be forgotten that sport did lend itself very well to a cinematographic representation.

16. Ibid., p.199

Table 2: Subject matter contained in the newsreels.¹⁷

(The number and per cent of reels and of items which dealt with each type of subject matter, arranged according to frequency of the X newsreel.)

Category.	Rank according to frequency.		Reels				Different items			
			X		Y		X		Y	
	X	Y	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sports.	1	1	87	74	82	94	138	14	230	30
Animals, birds, fish and insects	2	12	71	60	15	17	85	9	15	2
War-army-navy.	3	2	64	54	53	61	83	9	89	15
Aviation (civil).	4	4	52	44	32	37	66	7	42	5
Engineering and scientific marvels and inventions.	5	20	47	40	8	9	65	7	8	1
Accidents, fires, storms, wrecks and disasters.	6	16	52	44	12	14	62	6	13	2
Conventions, reunions, contests, parades, festivals, pageants.	7	5	43	36	29	33	49	5	37	5
Economic conditions.	8	9	40	34	22	25	43	5	26	3
Government and civic officials	9	3	40	34	52	60	47	5	77	10
Curiosities and freaks.	10	25	34	29	2	2	43	5	2	.3
Police and criminal activities.	11	7	37	31	25	29	42	4	32	4
Governmental-political-civic.	12	8	34	29	23	26	37	4	29	4
Religion.	13	19	31	26	11	13	33	3	11	1
Educational and instructive.	14	14	27	23	15	17	30	3	17	2
Commerce, transportation and industry.	15	18	23	19	11	13	26	3	11	1
Celebrities.	16	11	22	19	16	18	22	2	17	2
Prohibition and liquor.	17	6	17	14	26	30	19	2	28	4
Children & their activities.	18	17	15	13	12	14	15	2	12	2
Entertainment.	19	24	13	11	5	6	15	2	5	.6
Fashion shows.	20	15	10	8	15	17	10	1	15	2
World peace.	21	22	7	6	7	8	7	.7	7	1
Beauty contests.	22	23	5	4	6	7	5	.5	6	.7
Explorations & adventure.	23	26	5	4	1	1	5	.5	1	.1
Music.	24	10	2	2	19	22	2	.2	19	2
Scenic splendours.	25	21	2	2	8	9	2	.2	8	1
Dancing.	26	13	1	1	15	17	1	.1	15	2
Total			118	100	87	100	952	100	772	100

17. Ibid., p.201.

What is more important with regard to the newsreels' potential for covering the Spanish Civil War is that items of war ranked third in the X reel and second in the Y reel. "Since 54% of the X and 61% of the Y newsreel contain shots of such activities we note that the chances are greater than even that one will see some phase of war activity depicted on the screen if he sees either of these newsreels."¹⁸

Other items that ranked high with both companies are civil aviation, conventions etc., government and civic officials, and economic conditions. However it is interesting that items on world peace fare badly. In fact the ratio of total world peace items to war items, in the combined totals of both companies, was approximately 1 to 12. Once again the answer to the discrepancy is simple, if somewhat macabre. For war coverage must by definition be that much more full of action, and hence more photogenic, than matters of world peace.

For the purposes of this study then, two major points of interest arise from Dale's findings. First, the newsreels under his consideration, for the period he studied, were by no means provincial in character. They did devote a fair amount of screen time to coverage of foreign matters. And second, the newsreels covered topics of war in great profusion. In passing, it is perhaps worthwhile adding that the newsreels in question seem to have devoted a lot of time to covering matters such as economic conditions, government

18. Ibid., p.202

and civic officials, and engineering inventions, which would appear to give the lie to those critics who accused the newsreels of dealing only with trivia. However it should be remembered that Dale's analysis was purely quantitative in nature and not by any means qualitative.

There is another analysis of newsreel content which should be brought under review for the purpose of determining whether Dale's findings can only be applied to one particular period and two specific newsreels. For in 1950, Leo Handel published a book entitled Hollywood Looks at its Audience, in which he examined newsreel content for ten years from 1939 to 1948. Once again, it should be noted that the analysis of newsreel content by Leo Handel, as with Edgar Dale, refers only to American newsreels. But Handel's survey was that much more comprehensive than Dale's since it was compiled from the newsreel releases for 1939 to 1948 of Movietone News, News of the Day, Paramount News, Pathé News, and Universal News. Of course Handel's survey also traverses the years of the Second World War with the consequent American commitment to fighting in both Europe and the Pacific. One might therefore confidently expect the war coverage to be that much more pronounced, as indeed happens, with a drop in such topics as sport. So for the purposes of this study, the examination of Handel's findings has been confined to the results for one year alone, that of 1939. The results then are as follows:

Table 3: Topical content for 1939.(Expressed as a per centage)¹⁹

National News:

Aviation.	3.1	
Disaster, fires etc.	3.4	
Farm.	0.2	
Fashion, styles.	1.8	
Governmental news.	5.1	
Health.	0.4	
Industrial progress.	0.7	
Labour news.	0.8	
National defence.	4.1	
Political news.	0.8	
Religious news.	1.0	
Science.	1.1	
Sports.	26.1	
Weather.	0.8	
Miscellaneous.	21.8	
Foreign news.	18.3	(excluding World War 2 coverage)
War in Europe.	10.5	
	<u>100.0</u>	
Total number of clips.	4,940.	

What is perhaps most obvious is the similarity of Handel's findings with those of Dale, despite an intervening gap of six-and-a-half years. There are differences which can be accounted for by prevailing trends. For example, Prohibition and Liquor appear in Dale's survey but not Handel's, and similarly National Defence appears in Handel's survey, obviously as a result of the political uncertainties and fears throughout the middle and later years of the thirties.

19. Leo Handel, Hollywood Looks at its Audience, Urbana, Illinois, 1950, p.170.

Furthermore what constituted the general term "War" in Dale's findings has become encapsulated into the specific term "War in Europe" by the end of 1939. Handel also has this catch-all category entitled "miscellaneous" to accommodate anything that does not easily fall into his other categories. However, foreign news still compares well at 18.3% with Dale's figures of 20% in his X reel and 22% in his Y reel. And war occupies 10.5% of screen time in Handel's survey compared with 9% and 15% respectively in Dale. The correlation is sufficiently strong as to suggest that foreign news and war coverage appeared consistently and regularly throughout the American newsreels in the decade from 1930.

Unfortunately there is little in the way of a systematic and thorough analysis of the content of British newsreels during the same period which would enable one to see whether the trends and emphases shown in the American newsreels were repeated in the British Isles. There are however two minor surveys which were conducted by World Film News for July and September in 1936.

Table 4: British Newsreel Analysis for July, 1936.²⁰

Newsreel.	Total No. of items spotted by W.F.N.	Sport.	Royalty.	Military.	Foreign.	Empire.
British Movietone News.	88	28	9	4	17	6
British Paramount News.	49	11	8	2	7	4
Gaumont British News.	61	22	8	4	14	2
Pathé Gazette.	25	12	7	-	1	-
Universal News.	85	21	11	9	7	1
Totals	308	94	43	19	46	13

20. World Film News, Vol. 1, No.6, September, 1936, p.31.

Table 5: British Newsreel Analysis for September, 1936.²¹

Newsreel.	Total no. of items spotted by W.F.N.	Sport.	Royalty.	Military.	Foreign.	Empire.
Movietone.	91	22	5	6	19	1
Paramount.	52	8	7	5	13	3
Gaumont.	88	20	8	5	26	1
Pathé.	58	14	5	4	13	3
Universal.	<u>68</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>1</u>
Totals	357	81	29	29	86	9

Several points can be made about the World Film News surveys.

Both the topics "Royalty" and "Empire" are items that one would not have expected to find, quite understandably, in the content analyses of American newsreels. It is also obvious that these two surveys are by no means as exhaustive in their classifications as their American counterparts. Yet for all that the preponderance of sport as the number one subject compares exactly with the American reels, as does the prevalence of foreign items, within which World Film News included the Spanish Civil War. Military matters, as far as they were concerned, did not include war, yet it still appears prominently.

A more recent survey, conducted by the Slade Film History Register, attempted to look closely at two British newsreels, British Paramount and British Movietonews, to ascertain how many stories they issued relating specifically to Germany or the Germans between the years of 1933 to 1939. Their results are equally as revealing in determining how much newsreel time was given over to foreign affairs coverage.

21. World Film News, Vol. 1, No.8, November, 1936, p.39.

Table 6: Stories relating to Germany or Germans, 1933-1939.²²

British Paramount News.				British Movietone News.			
	"News-type items."	Other.	Total.	"News-type items."	Other.	Total.	
1933	20	11	31	20	10	30	
1934	12	7	19	11	8	19	
1935	18	16	34	21	11	32	
1936	16	22	38	16	8	24	
1937	26	15	41	11	5	16	
1938	43	12	55	43	9	52	
1939	29	5	34	16	1	17	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
Total	164	88	252	138	52	190	

Unlike the previous surveys already cited the Slade analysis went so far as to introduce a qualitative factor into the proceedings, by dividing the coverage on Germany into serious news, what it termed "News-type items", and anything else appertaining to Germany. It estimated that there were approximately 1248 stories per year for each of the two newsreels, given 2 newsreel issues per week, with an average of 12 stories per issue. From such a total it is evident that there were a low number of stories per annum reflecting hard news on Germany or the Germans, the greatest total being 43 stories out of 1248, which was achieved in 1938, the year of the Munich Crisis. However as a proportion of all stories relating to German issues, the proportion of serious items is high, reaching approximately 65% for Paramount and 70% for Movietone.

At the quantitative level the Spanish Civil War was

22. Slade Film History Register, Survey on Stories Relating to Germany or Germans, 1933-1939, Unpublished (mimeographed copy).

well covered. During the period from July 27, 1936, when the first story on Spain appeared in Gaumont British issue no.269, to April 3, 1939, when issue 549 covered the entry of Franco's troops into Madrid, there were altogether 280 newsreel releases from this company. The Spanish Civil War reported in 71 of these 280 releases, amounting to one quarter of the possible coverage. There were reports on Spain in 25 out of the 44 issues for the last six months of 1936, 21 out of the 103 releases throughout 1937, 12 out of a possible 104 in 1938, and 13 out of a possible 26 up to April 3, 1939.

The first report appeared in British Paramount's newsreel for August 6, 1936, in issue 568 and from that point up to issue 845 for April 3, 1939, there was a mention of the Spanish Civil War in 65 out of a possible 277 newsreel releases. That figure broke down into 17 out of 41 for 1936, 21 out of 104 in 1937, 17 out of 103 in 1938 and 10 out of 26 for 1939.

So if the American and British criticisms of their respective newsreels, namely that they were trivial in content, are to be vindicated then one need only look at the numerous surveys of newsreel content. For they do make it abundantly clear that the most popular newsreel topic by far was sport. Nevertheless such a claim is not fully substantiated, for the same surveys also reveal that a large amount of newsreel time was devoted to foreign affairs and to subjects of a military or war-like nature. Therefore the newsreels did at least cover a foreign event such as the Spanish Civil War in great quantity. It will also be seen that their coverage was of a particularly high quality.

(c) Censorship

By 1936, film censorship had been in operation in Britain for many years. The Cinematograph Act of 1909 had provided the legal basis for the censorship of films, although it had in fact been instigated to protect cinema audiences against the risk of fire. For the Act empowered the Home Secretary to put into effect regulations for the exhibition of inflammable film provided there were adequate safeguards. Henceforth such film could only be exhibited in premises which were appropriately licensed for that purpose. The licenses were to be dispensed by local authorities who were in turn empowered to delegate the authority to local justices, watch committees and to borough, urban or rural district councils. "Subject to the Home Secretary's regulations, the licensing authority may attach conditions to the granting of a licence and it has been ruled by High Court decisions that these conditions may relate to matters other than the safety of the audience."¹ So it was that the local authorities found themselves in the position of acting as the final arbiter and censor of films which were to be shown in their areas.

The British Board of Film Censors was not actually set up until 1912 and even then it was founded and maintained by the film trade itself. Although the submission of films to the Board of Censors was at first voluntary, with no mandatory obligations on the part of the film renters, by 1933 it had become an unwritten law among the renters that only certificated films would go on release into their cinemas.

1. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.210.

It was the Board's job to send to licensing authorities a statement of the films it had reviewed, passed and classified under one of its various headings such as "U" or "A".

In 1929, J.R. Clynes, then the Home Secretary, issued a Home Office circular containing model rules for the guidance of local authorities, as part of a plan to evolve a common policy for local licensing authorities. The circular had been based upon the experience of the London County Council, and certain other authorities, with regard to their experiences of film approval. It acknowledged the work of the Board of Film Censors and stipulated that no film which had not been passed as suitable by the Board should be shown without the consent of the local council concerned and that the Board's classification of films should be adhered to.²

From the very beginnings of censorship the newsreels were exempt from the conditions appertaining to most films and were not subject, officially, to a review by the Board of Film Censors. When the Board had been set up in 1912 they had decided that newsreels should not come under their aegis for several reasons. First of all the Board was more concerned with fictional and feature films, and by that time the newsreels were only just becoming recognised as a regular part of the cinema programme. It has also been suggested that "the tradition of a free press" was applied to the newsreels thereby swaying the Board's decision not

2. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.212.

to interfere with their presentation of the news.³ But it is more likely that the necessarily speedy time factor involved in the printing and distribution of newsreel film to cinemas probably played the greatest part in determining what the Board would decide. It is noticeable also that the L.C.C. included in its regulations on censorship for 1921 an exception for material which included "photographs of current events". This exemption had apparently been included in the conditions imposed by other councils throughout the preceding decade, and was subsequently incorporated in the successive drafts of the Home Office model conditions and eventually absorbed in the licensing regulations of the two hundred or more licensing authorities.⁴

Yet this ability to proceed without a certificate from the Board of Censors did not make, as one might at first expect, either the newsreel companies or their product more independent in outlook. For as Neville March Hunnings noted, it simply left the newsreels "in a more exposed position, for they were completely unprotected by the law (as indeed they still are)."⁵ It left the newsreel companies open to criticism from any quarter whatsoever, in particular from that most notorious and nebulous of sources, public opinion. The newsreels were a feather for every wind that blew and the years prior to 1935, and immediately after,

3. Neville March Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, London 1967, p.110.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

reveal just that. The newsreels might have been exempt from censorship, as officially expressed, but they could not escape the pressures of either the public or governmental varieties. The film trade for its part showed little interest in protecting what might be termed the freedom of the cinema's press. In fact the situation was quite the opposite for the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association went out of its way to oppose the introduction of what it called "propaganda" on the cinema screen. And, as far as the C.E.A. was concerned, propaganda was a word which embraced any form of controversial statement or opinion, whether reported or performed.⁶ It is difficult to see how the newsreel organisations could fail to get into trouble when such limited terms of reference were applied.

Prior to 1935 the public criticism of newsreels was mostly concerned with the depiction of violence and what Warwickshire County Council called "harrowing pictures of fatal accidents".⁷ Today one tends to get the impression that the public outcry against the depiction of violence on the screen is a postwar phenomenon, enhanced by the arrival of television. But there is enough evidence to suggest that it was as prevalent during the thirties as it is now. One good example turned up in the columns of The Times for Friday, December 1, 1933, in a piece entitled "Horror in News Films" and read: "There is now being shown in this

6. For one response to the C.E.A.'s attitude see p.100.

7. Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.111.

country an American newsreel which ends with a shot of one of the lynched kidnappers of a certain Mr. Hart hanging from a tree surrounded by a howling mob." The Times columnist was evidently most worried about the effects of this film upon the undoubtedly vast cinemagoing audience for he continues "this is the latest and most horrifying manifestation of a growing tendency to sacrifice all decency to sensationalism in the presentation of news on the screen". Finally, he concludes, that "It is greatly to be hoped that before long steps will be taken to safeguard the public from the exhibition of such scenes."⁸

The morals of what should or should not have been shown on the cinema screen do not concern us here, but what is of utmost interest is the response that such outcries elicited from the newsreel companies in reply. This particular newsreel was withdrawn from the cinemas and in a statement circulated to all the press, an official of British Paramount News, the offending company, said:

In view of the public resentment at the showing of this newsreel we have decided to withdraw the whole shot. I would make it clear that there has been no question of representation from official sources, nor at the time it was withdrawn did we know that it was intended to ask a question about it in the House of Commons. We are servants of the public and we withdraw it as a gesture to their opinion.⁹

Such overt acts of self-censorship were not enough to stave off the mounting criticism, particularly from the local

8. "Horror in News Films", The Times, December 1, 1933.

9. The Times, December 2, 1933.

authorities. Early in 1934, Warwickshire County Council wrote to the Film Censorship Consultative Committee at the Home Office and demanded that newsreels should be censored. Later in that year the same County Council passed a resolution:

That this Council views with concern the offence to public feeling, and the harmful effect upon children, likely to be caused by the exhibition in news films of incidents of harrowing scenes of loss of life and of suffering, such as have lately been shown in connection with a fatal aeroplane accident, a liner disaster, and more recently an assassination, and urges the Secretary of State to take such action, or to bring such pressure to bear, as will prevent in the future the introduction into news films of such incidents.¹⁰

In August of 1934, a twifold action came from the Film Censorship Consultative Committee, which declared that it was considering the question raised by Warwickshire, and from the British Board of Film Censors, which stated in its annual report for 1933 that it was considering the definition of the term newsreel, for purposes of censorship. Birmingham actually went so far as to include newsreels in censorship in November of that year and the L.C.C. came up with a definition of the term newsreel as being "any exhibition of films (known in the trade as 'Topicals' or 'Locals') of actual events, recorded in the press at the time or about the time of exhibition, whether exhibited with or without sound effects or commentary."¹¹

10. Kinematograph Weekly, November 5, 1934, p.5.

11. Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.112.

Thus 1934 proved to be a bad year for the newsreels, as far as the public and local authority resentment at their depiction of violence was concerned. Finally the government felt compelled to step in and attempt to quell the impending uproar, and on October 24, 1934, the Home Office issued circular 676417/6 under the title Revision of Model Conditions.¹² Obviously the circular was a sop to public opinion and to the pressure which had emanated from the local authorities to include the newsreels under film censorship. For it reported that "in recent months a number of newsreels have been the subject of criticism on account of the objectionable nature of the incidents depicted in them." For the most part the circular concerned itself, not unexpectedly, with the depiction of violence and with the question of what constituted a proper interpretation of the phrase "photographs of current events", in order that licensing authorities could consider the desirability of adopting the revised model conditions to licenses granted by them. It went on:

There may be a great difference between the effects produced on the screen and by a description in a newspaper, and it is necessary, in order that the susceptibilities of the public may not be offended, that this fact be taken into account in the presentation of pictures and commentary at cinematograph exhibitions. It should be borne in mind that the first of the model conditions which prohibits the exhibition of films likely to be offensive to public feelings, applies to newsreels as well as to other films.

12. Home Office Circular 676417/6, Revision of Model Conditions, October 24, 1934.

Yet for all the public and local authority clamour, this circular seems to be as far as the government felt compelled to go, in order to be seen to have acted over the matter of violence in the newsreels. The government never felt the necessity to interfere with the newsreel companies over this issue, nor to impose censorship on them. However a different outlook obtained with regard to points of political controversy.

In the first instance complaints over the introduction of what was called propaganda into the newsreels came from politicians who objected to the reporting in news films of speeches by political leaders. In 1933, for example, Herbert Morrison maintained that "At the L.C.C. I have called attention to items included in a news film two weeks running in London cinemas which appeared to me to encourage Fascist mob militarism."¹³ Similarly Ernest Bevin, who was at the time the General Secretary of the Transport Workers Union, "protested against the use of newsreels for propaganda purposes and instanced a film report of Lloyd George in which the latter accused the Allied Powers of breaking their pledge to Germany about disarmament".¹⁴ Of course all that these men were worried about was the appearance in newsreels of other people expressing political opinions with which they did not agree. However the newsreels still had to tread warily and eventually the General Council of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association reached such a stage of fright that it only reluctantly felt able to "give permission" to the

13. Kinematograph Weekly, April 13, 1933, p.43.

14. Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.111.

newsreel companies to include in their issues speeches by cabinet ministers.¹⁵

But what proved to be far more important was the actual number of instances where government interfered in what should or should not be shown to audiences because of political overtures from one source or another. Kinematograph Weekly, a cinema trade magazine, cites several examples of political interference of this sort. One such example concerned the newsreel coverage of violent demonstrations and rioting which occurred in the Place de la Concorde in Paris on February 6, 1934. Since the rioting had been part of a Right-wing attempt to overthrow the Third Republic, the French Government requested that the French newsreels should not show their material on the events. But British Paramount News had also covered the proceedings and the film, as they stated, was "already in our hands the day after the events in Paris, having been brought out of France before the French Government's censorship had taken effect, (and was) subsequently the subject of diplomatic representations. As a result the pictures were not released until two days later."¹⁶ Of course to cause a delay in the exhibition of newsreel material was not quite so reprehensible as the outright requests for suppression which once again emanated from the French Government over British newsreel coverage of the assassination of King Alexander of Serbia in Marseilles on October 9, 1934. For apart from the diplomatic affront and disgrace involved in having a visiting monarch killed

15. Kinematograph Weekly, July 23, 1936, p.13.

16. Kinematograph Weekly, March 8, 1934, p.4.

on French soil, the French disarray was compounded by the fact that Louis Barthou, their Foreign Minister, had also been murdered along with King Alexander. Hence the French call for outright suppression of the material appertaining to these events.

Paramount went ahead and showed their film. But the row caused by the exhibition of these pictures in British cinemas caused a debate to ensue in the House of Commons on November 1, 1934. Capt. Cunningham Reid, the Unionist Member of Parliament for St. Marylebone, opened with a question asking the Home Secretary, Sir J. Gilmour, whether he was contemplating the imposition of censorship upon cinema newsreels, only to be answered by the Home Secretary who replied:

No sir, but I have thought it my duty to see representatives of this branch of the industry and to point out that it rests with them so to handle their material as to make it unnecessary for the Government to consider the imposition of any censorship on newsreels. 17

The fact was that the Home Office was little worried about what the newsreels showed unless of course they reflected opinions bearing upon matters which the government might consider to be "touchy". And from 1935 onwards the British Government of the day was becoming increasingly worried about the general events in Europe, as a result of which their interest in the newsreels' reflection of those events became that much more acute. As Norman Hulbert, who was an M.P., as well as being the managing director of the largest news

17. House of Commons Debates, Vol. 293, column 339, November 1, 1934.

theatre circuit in Britain, went on to put it, "There was no Government control, although sometimes a hint was given that it was not desirable to publish a certain item, and it was usual to respect their wishes on such occasions."¹⁸

The British Board of Film Censors went on to show that for its part it was not averse to cutting politically sensitive items from other films. A March of Time release called "Thread to Gib" which showed the threatened grip by the Fascists on the Mediterranean owing to the situation in Spain was banned. Although the March of Time was a newsreel, it was in fact a monthly newsreel compilation and therefore did come under the Board's jurisdiction. In November, 1937, the documentary film entitled "Spanish Earth", by Joris Ivens, was cut because it contained a suggestion, and only a suggestion, that Germany and Italy were intervening in Spain. Another film, made under the title "Britain's Dilemma", and shown in the United States with that title, dealt with the events of "the retreat" from the League, Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain and China, and which stopped short at Czechoslovakia, was released here after a number of cuts and re-titled "Britain and Peace". Munich in fact proved to be the breaking point for the newsreels, and as Neville March Hunnings commented, "between Munich and the outbreak of war, exhibitors, councils and Government all took a more restrictive attitude over the whole field of censorship."¹⁹

18. Kinematograph Weekly, November 5, 1936, p.17.

19. Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.113.

This restrictive attitude manifested itself most strongly with regard to a British Paramount story on the Munich crisis. During the crisis four out of the five news-reels showing in London played down the Czech point of view, but British Paramount, with the independently minded G.T. Cummings in charge, gave it a good deal of screen time. Paramount invited Wickham Steed and A.J. Cummings to speak during the reel. The issue was compiled on the evening of September 21, 1938, and it was withdrawn on September 22. A telegram was allegedly sent by Paramount to its theatres saying: "Please delete Wickham Steed and A.J. Cummings from today's Paramount News. We have been officially requested to do so."²⁰ Paramount later denied that they had been officially requested to do so and said they had done it at their own discretion. However on November 23, Geoffrey Mander, the Liberal M.P. for East Wolverhampton, asked in the House of Commons "Why representations were recently made by His Majesty's Government to the American Embassy for the withdrawal from a Paramount newsreel of items contributed by Mr. Wickham Steed and Mr. A.J. Cummings?" Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke in reply:

His Majesty's Government considered that certain passages in the newsreel referred to, which was being shown at the time of the Prime Minister's conversations with Herr Hitler at Godesberg, might have a prejudicial effect upon the negotiations. The Ambassador or the United States, I understand, thought it right to communicate this consideration to a member of the Hays organisation which

20. H.C.Deb., Vol. 342, c.1275, December 7, 1938.

customarily deals with matters of this kind and which brought it to the attention of Paramount who from a sense of public duty in the general interest, decided to make certain excisions from the newsreel.... I am glad that the ambassador and ourselves were in complete accord.²¹

If indeed this account accurately reflects the truth of the operation, and there is little reason to believe that it does not, then it gives a good idea of the tortuous yet effective way in which the Government had set about securing the excisions it desired whilst at the same time ensuring that it appeared to "keep its hands clean". They informed the American Ambassador, Joseph P. Kennedy, of the offending items, who in turn informed the Hays office, presumably in America for they did not have an office in this country. And since the Hays organisation was based in America, they must have conveyed the feelings of all concerned to the head office of American Paramount, who finally got back to the offices of British Paramount in London to effect the cuts.

Understandably Sir John Simon's argument that the British Government and the American Ambassador just happened to find themselves in complete accord over this matter did not convince. As Dingle Foot put it so succinctly in a Commons debate on December 7:

Are we seriously asked by a Minister of the Crown to believe that the conversations which were taking place on that day or maybe the next between the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler would really have been affected by the news film displayed at a London cinema? I do not believe any member of the House will believe it for a moment.²²

21. H.C.Deb., Vol. 341, c.1727-1728, November 23, 1938.

22. H.C.Deb., Vol. 342, c.1313, December 7, 1938.

Geoffrey Mander had remained unconvinced from the start of the affair for on December 1, he had broached the subject in the House with the Prime Minister, in an interchange which revealed that either Chamberlain had not been informed of the progress on this issue or that he was an expert prevaricator.

Mr. Mander: In what instances in addition to the case of the Paramount newsreel has action been taken to ask for the removal of parts of cinema films on political grounds?

Mr. Chamberlain: I am not aware of any instances in which the removal of parts of cinema films has been asked for by the government on political grounds.

Mander: Then there is no precedent for the request recently made to the American Ambassador to take action on such lines?

Chamberlain: No such request has been made.

Mander: But is it not the case that the Chancellor of the Exchequer said quite clearly last week that he had got in touch with the American Ambassador and asked for the removal of such items?

Chamberlain: No sir. (N.B. The Times reports this as: Mr. Chamberlain was understood to reply in the negative.)

Mr. H. Morrison: Will the Prime Minister inquire and make certain whether the headquarters of his own political party do not take a hand in this unofficial censorship?

Mander: Do I understand the Prime Minister to say that the government exercised no pressure of any kind whatsoever to ask the American Ambassador to get these items withdrawn?

Chamberlain: The attention of the American Ambassador was drawn to certain items and he was asked to look into the matter.

Sounds of Opposition laughter.²³

What is of far more importance, however, is to examine the excisions that were actually made in order to determine whether the government might have wished to cut any items and to establish whether they were detrimental. The story was issued as part of Paramount's release for September 22 and entitled "Europe's Fateful Hour".²⁴ They attempted to produce a comprehensive survey of the important European events at the time. The story included frontier scenes from the Sudetenland, shots of refugees in Germany and Prague, shots of Germany's new defences on the Rhine, a view of Godesberg preparing for the meeting of Hitler and Chamberlain and finally, film of demonstrations in London. In the course of this narrative of events Paramount introduced Wickham Steed as the former editor of The Times and a friend of President Masaryk and then the commentary went on:

British Paramount News, seeking still further independent and informed opinion, interviewed the famous foreign affairs journalist, Mr. A.J. Cummings; and for the man-in-the-street's viewpoint sought the popular broadcasting taxi-driver, Mr. Herbert Hodge.

Such an array of people brought together for the purposes of an interview on a topic of current affairs is now commonplace in broadcasting, provided of course some time is allotted

23. H.C.Deb., Vol. 342, c.583-584, December 1, 1938.

24. BP Issue No.790, 22/9/38. "Europe's Fateful Hour."

for the opinions of the government under criticism. But the technique as applied to this newsreel was unique in its day and thereby that much more open to attack, as indeed were the opinions purveyed by the speakers each of whom was highly critical of government policy, all the more so in fact since nobody actually spoke on the government's behalf. Wickham Steed began with a straightforward speech which ran:

Has England surrendered? Who is "England"? The Government or Parliament or the people? The British Parliament has not surrendered for it has not been convened, and still less have the British people. Our Government, together with that of France, is trying to make a present to Hitler, for use against us when he may think the time has come, of the three million men and thousands of aeroplanes he would need to overcome Czechoslovak resistance. Hitler doesn't want to fight. Oh, no. He only wants to get without fighting more than he would be able to get by fighting. And we seem to be helping him to get it. And all this because British and French ministers feared to take risk when they could have taken it successfully and believed they could diminish the risk by helping Hitler, when he was at his wit's end, instead of standing up to him.

It is possible to ascertain from the script for this story in the Paramount archives that, even as it stood, and before it was excised completely, Wickham Steed's speech had been shorn of a concluding paragraph in a piece of self-censorship by Paramount. Evidently Paramount felt his intended final words went too far in stating:

There may still be a chance of averting the worst if we encourage the Czechs to stand firm and make our Government understand that we repudiate its policy of surrendering our vital interests and besmirching our good name.

After Wickham Steed's speech there then followed a dialogue between Hodge and Cummings:

Hodge: Well, Mr. Cummings, what do you think of the news? Everybody's saying to me that England has surrendered to Hitler. Do you think that's right?

Cummings: Well, beyond a doubt, Hitler has won an overwhelming diplomatic triumph for German domination of Europe. Nothing in future will stop him but a mass WAR.

Hodge: I think most of us, although we want peace, er, with all our hearts, we would be prepared to go to war if it was a case of either going to war or allowing Hitler to dominate Europe.

Cummings: The fact is our statesmen have been guilty of what I think is a piece of yellow diplomacy, if in good time we had made a joint declaration with France and with Russia making clear our intentions, and stating emphatically and in expressed terms that we would prevent the invasion of Czechoslovakia, I'm certain that Hitler would not have faced that formidable combination. If we were not prepared to go to the extreme limit we should certainly not have engaged in a game of bluff with finest poker player in Europe.

Hodge: What worries me about it all, Mr. Cummings, is whether we've simply postponed war for another year or two, against a much stronger Hitler of the future.

Cummings: I'm afraid we've only postponed war and, frankly, I am very fearful about what is yet in store for millions of young men of military age in all the countries of Europe.

These then were the speeches which were cut from the Paramount release. They are indeed harshly critical of the

government's policy, though they displayed great foresight, and one can understand why many people might not have wanted them to be shown in cinemas throughout the country. Perhaps Paramount might have got away without any cuts if they had thought to include a government spokesman. But it is more than likely that Tom Cummings, Paramount's editor-in-chief, knew that the only way to attempt such an innovation as political commentators was by means of a *fait accompli*. Nor can one disguise the fact that the successful attempts to delete these items amounted to little more than political censorship of a supposedly free medium of communication. In their stead the three speakers were replaced by a new story entitled "Premier flies for peace" in which Neville Chamberlain said:

A peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak problem is an essential preliminary to a better understanding between the British and the German peoples, and that, in its turn, is an indispensable foundation of European peace. European peace is what I am aiming at, and I hope that this journey may open the way to get it.

Geoffrey Mander recounted the nature of the excisions to the House when for a third time, on December 7, he raised the whole matter of censorship and the restriction of liberty. This time, however, he also tabled a motion:

That this House attaching the utmost importance to the maintenance undiminished of British democratic traditions of the liberty of expression of opinion, both in the press and in public meetings and also in other media such as cinema films, would greatly deplore any action by the Government of the day which tended to set up any form of political censorship or which exercised pressure direct or indirect.²⁵

25. H.C.Deb., Vol. 342, c.1261, December 7, 1938.

Besides the example of the Paramount newsreel, he went on to mention other instances of what he believed to be political interference on films such as "Nazi Conquest No.1. (Austria)", "Inside Nazi Germany", "Croix de Feu", and another one called "Crisis in Algeria", which purported to show the possibility of a North African coup, perpetrated by a Fascist state. The main point of Mander's long speech was encapsulated in his request to the House to observe:

That in all the examples I have given, in every case where cuts have been made, nothing anti-Government, nothing anti-Fascist is permitted, but anything that is favourable to the policy the Government is pursuing is allowed to go forward...I do not say by any means that it is always done at the direct instigation of the Government but I do believe there is pressure by Government departments or by their friends at times. It is widely alleged in the press and elsewhere that the Conservative Central Office is not wholly disinterested in or without knowledge of what is going on.²⁶

But despite a heated debate and strong endorsements of Mander's sentiments from other members such as Archibald Sinclair, Dingle Foot, Philip Noel Baker, and Wedgwood Benn, an amendment to his motion from a Mr. Beechman, which added that the House "is fully satisfied that His Majesty's Government have maintained these traditions unimpaired" finally won the day, and in effect proved the death knell for the concern over censorship in the Commons.

There were subsequent nominal questions raised in the House throughout 1939, but the feelings which had built up to the debate in December, 1938, provided altogether the

26. H.C.Deb., Vol. 342, c.1273, December 7, 1938.

highest point of fear among M.P.'s at the manipulation of the newsreels. Of course within a short time the newsreels found themselves within the midst of a Second World War, during which, as one might expect, they were strictly regulated as to what they could and could not show and when anyway they became part of an overall propaganda machine under official control.

In the meantime the County Councils Association reared its head again with a further proposal for censorship of newsreels over a week old, which had been instigated by yet another request from Warwickshire County Council, along with one from Hertfordshire as well this time, "drawing attention to the fact that scenes of war, sudden death and violence were included from time to time in newsreels."²⁷

The spectre of censorship or public and governmental pressure haunted the thirties. The newsreels simply had to learn to live with it. On a more general level it is possible to see the years from 1933 to 1939 as leading quite logically and cumulatively towards the kind of government control that manifested itself during World War II. The pressures of public opinion took their toll in the early years and sufficiently sapped the strength of the newsreel companies as well as reducing their capacity for an independent, informed opinion, if indeed they ever had any. The local county councils helped and the government of the day finally broke it. It only remains to be seen what sort of effect this pressure had upon the newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War.

27. Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.113.

Chapter 4Beyond the Newsreels

So far this study has concentrated upon the newsreels. Yet, during the 1930s the newsreels were but one form of several media of mass communication. They were just one of the many agencies of mass or multiple transmission on matters of public information. And before going on to a detailed investigation of the newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War, it would be as well to survey briefly the nature of these other forms of the media. The purpose, as with the newsreels thus far, is to assess the character of their organisations, their goals, and their major preoccupations as disseminators of fact and opinion on the news and current affairs, if indeed they saw themselves as such. Only then will it be possible to place the newsreels in the general context and structure of British society at the time, and to see whether they were in any way different from the rest of the media. Such a survey would of course necessitate looking at the remaining branches of the film industry, in particular at the documentary realm, though also to some extent at the feature film side of the industry, and at certain aspects of the B.B.C. and the press.

To judge from the writings of George Orwell, one might expect to find little of value emanating from these media, for he saw only "the concentration of the Press in the hands of a few rich men, the grip of monopoly on radio

and the films".¹ The result, according to Orwell, was that "in England the immediate enemies of truthfulness, and hence of freedom of thought, are the Press lords, the film magnates and the bureaucrats".² And the inevitable outcome in Orwell's eyes was a form of censorship in which, for example, "Soviet Russia constitutes a sort of forbidden area in the British Press", or where "issues like Poland, the Spanish Civil War, the Russo German pact, and so forth, are debarred from serious discussion".³

Of course Orwell was making those comments as part of a particular essay which he wrote in 1946, after a long period of war during which the media had in any case been severely restricted, by the government, about what they could and could not say. However it is clear from the essay that Orwell was referring to the period of the late 1930s in Britain as much as he was to the Second World War. And it was obviously Orwell's considered opinion that because the media during that time were concentrated in the hands of a small elite body of men, then the public at large was only likely to find out about matters which this body of

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1. George Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature", first published in Polemic, No.2, January 1946, and reprinted in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol.IV: In Front of your Nose, 1945-1950, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, Harmondsworth 1971, p.82.
 2. Ibid., p.87.
 3. Ibid., p.87.

men wanted them to find out about. In other words, that selection and manipulation were inherent factors in the character of the media generally, as a result of the monopoly control of a small elite, and that the public only got part of the story on any issue which was covered by the media. Tom Harrisson, one of the founders of Mass Observation, takes the argument even further to suggest that during these years a situation developed in which "a dangerous gap had widened between the ordinary and non-vocal masses of British and a highly specialised set of organs and organisations speaking for all through Parliament, Press and radio".⁴ He concluded:

In the nineteen-thirties, astonishingly little bridged the gap between the organs of supposed power (Press, B.B.C., etc.) in Britain and the mass of non-vociferous Britishers.⁵

But was that really the case? Some of Orwell's accusations regarding the grip of monopoly and forbidden areas of discussion can be successfully applied to the newsreels, as have already been shown to be the case. But what of the media generally? Were they, in effect, the organs of established authority? What preoccupied them most of all and what messages were they putting forth? Were there no

4. As quoted in Stuart Hall, "Media and Message: the Life and Death of Picture Post", Cambridge Review, Vol.92, February 1971, p.143.

5. Ibid.

alternative outlets of information? These are the questions which, most of all, any survey into the British media during the 1930s will need to answer.

It is noticeable that, broadly speaking, the media appear to have been preoccupied throughout this period with what might loosely be called the projection of Britain. This interest manifested itself either in the images and messages which the different media projected, or in the projections of the media organisations themselves. It is a point much emphasised by Charles Barr in his article entitled "Projecting Britain and the British character".⁶ After apologising for the fact that he prefers to make no distinction in the article between England and Britain, Barr then goes on to point out how important the idea seemed to be for some of the men in charge of the various media organisations in this country. At its simplest the idea manifested itself in the title used by Sir Stephen Tallents, in 1932, for his pamphlet "The Projection of England". And as Barr recounts:

Tallents, Secretary of State to the Empire Marketing Board, was advocating a dynamic policy of promoting England and her interests by various forms of Public Relations activity, of which film would be one. He had already recruited John Grierson to run the EMB Film Unit, destined to be the creator of the British documentary tradition: during the 1930s

6. Barr, "Projecting Britain and the British Character", pp.87-121.

it was metamorphosed into the GPO, and then the Crown Film Unit.⁷

But the idea did not belong to Tallents and Grierson alone for, as Barr reminds us:

"The projection of England" is the precise phrase Reith's biographer attributes to him in his account of the B.B.C.'s pressure (unsuccessful) on the government to finance broadcasting to foreign countries in the period leading up to the war.⁸

Furthermore the B.B.C. was not only attempting to project Britain during this time, but it was in itself a projection of Britain, as Asa Briggs notes:

The favourite image of the B.B.C. during the 1930s was that of a great British institution, as British as the Bank of England.⁹

Nor indeed did the idea of the projection of Britain rest with the documentary film and the B.B.C. alone. When the Ealing feature film studios were sold in 1955, Sir Michael Balcon erected a plaque. Upon the plaque was an inscription which summarised the role, as Balcon saw it, that the studios had fulfilled during their lifetime. The inscription read:

7. Ibid., p.87.

8. Ibid., p.88.

9. Asa Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless, London 1965, p.12.

Here during a quarter of a century were made many films projecting Britain and the British character.¹⁰

Yet these particular men had more in common than just an idea. They were all in unique positions of responsibility to put forth their differing interpretations on the general idea, with the result that:

Reith, Balcon and (as a realiser of Tallents' vision) Grierson make up a trio of powerful figures in the creation, and the colouring, of distinctively British media. Their decades of seminal influence came successively; Reith's in the 1920s, Grierson's in the 1930s, Balcon's in the 1940s.¹¹

Indeed Barr might well have gone on to add Tallents to the trio in his own right for, after all, Tallents left the General Post Office, with its important film unit, in 1935 to take up a position with the B.B.C., where in 1936 he became Controller of Public Relations.

However it is one thing to suggest that all four men had a general idea in common, albeit for the most part unwittingly. It is a more difficult task to show the fruits of their thinking. How then did this projection of Britain manifest itself, in the documentary film, the feature film and the B.B.C.?

10. Barr, "Projecting Britain and the British Character", p.87.

11. Ibid., p.88.

First then the documentary film movement. Sir Stephen Tallents has said that the British documentary film came into existence at a meeting held at the Dominions Office on April 27, 1928. Present at the meeting with Tallents, who was the Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board on that occasion, were Mr. L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Dominions, Major W. Elliot, Chairman of the E.M.B. Film Committee, Mr. A.M. Samuel, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and Mr. J. Craig, also of the Treasury.¹² It was stated that the express aim of the documentary film movement was:

To create an atmosphere and to make available films showing interesting aspects of English life and English character. England herself was the subject of our advertisement.¹³

And two factors, which it was hoped would help to fulfil such a function, seem to have governed John Grierson's practical approach to making films for this purpose. The first was an inherent dislike of anything which smacked of the commercial cinema of the time, with its prolific use of studio shooting and professional actors; the second was an earnest belief that the documentary should form part of an anti-aesthetic movement. He openly admitted the

12. Sir Stephen Tallents, "The Birth of the British Documentary (Part 1)", Journal of the University Film Association, Vol.20, No.1, 1968, p.20.

13. Ibid.

presence of both elements in his thinking and, indeed, staked a greater and more grandiose claim for a third factor to be taken into consideration when he said:

Yes, there was the runaway from the synthetic world of the contemporary cinema, but so also, as I remember it, did documentary represent a reaction from the art world of the early and middle 1920s - Bloomsbury, Left Bank, T.S. Eliot, Clive Bell and all - by people with every reason to know it well. Likewise, if it was a return to "reality", it was a return not unconnected with Clydeside Movements, I.L.P.'s, the Great Depression, not to mention our Lord Keynes, the London School of Economics, Political and Economic Planning and such.¹⁴

In other words then, Grierson's third claim was that the documentary film movement achieved a certain "politicisation" of the film image. But all three claims need to be examined in order to ascertain just what picture of Britain it was that Grierson was trying to create.

Grierson's anti-commercial cinema complex crops up time and time again in his writings. The essay he wrote on "First principles of Documentary" put his feelings most forcefully on this score:

Studio films largely ignore the possibility of opening up the screen on the real world. They photograph acted stories against artificial backgrounds.¹⁵

14. As quoted in Rotha, Documentary Diary, pp.24-25.

15. John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary", in Grierson on Documentary, edited by Forsyth Hardy, London 1966, pp.146-147.

And again when Grierson said:

We believe that the original (or native) actor, and the original (or native) scene, are better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world...than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanician recreate...Materials and stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article... [They produce an] effect impossible to the shim-sham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.¹⁶

On this front it must be conceded that Grierson did live up to his principles with great success. For the most part he did take his cameras into the field, he did shoot on location, utilising the raw and spontaneous acting of people who were complete amateurs. As Alberto Cavalcanti put it some years later:

You can't deny that the documentary put the workers in films. Workers previously in film had been a kind of comical relief, since the documentary they became part of humanity.¹⁷

To this extent then Grierson achieved a certain "democratisation" of the film image, though whether this was inspired by political motives or basic, humanitarian motives is still open to question. And even on this front

16. Ibid., p.147.

17. As quoted during the course of an interview with Alberto Cavalcanti and printed in Screen, Vol.13, No.2, Summer 1972, p.44.

it is noticeable that on occasions Grierson still compromised the nature of his own definition of documentary.

There was a fine example of compromise in Grierson's first film "Drifters", which was made in 1929 and which was, incidentally, the only film he actually directed. The example has already been cited in the chapter on "Newsreel Content" but it is worthwhile citing again to emphasise the point under consideration. For in this film Grierson is guilty of the shim-sham mechanics of the commercial studios. "It is about the sea and fishermen", said Grierson, "and there is not a Piccadilly actor in the piece."¹⁸ True indeed, but it is also true that the drifter chosen for the film was chosen chiefly on the strength of the crew's supposed "photogenic quality". Tallents admitted that fact quite openly.¹⁹ Furthermore, as Tallents went on to reveal, the sculptor, John Skeaping, was engaged to design a studio set of the drifter's cabin which was erected near the harbour of Lerwick specifically for interior shooting. A fisheries protection vessel provided the lighting for this interior set. The underwater shots were made in a tank at the Plymouth Marine Biological Station. Then when the drifter couldn't find any herrings the whole operation was transferred to another drifter at

18. Grierson, "Drifters", in Grierson on Documentary, p.135.

19. Tallents, "The Birth of British Documentary (Part 2)", in Journal of the University Film Association, Vol.20, No.2, 1966, p.27.

Lowestoft. Quite simply "Drifters" presented a typically fabricated image, even if the subject matter was about something which would not have emanated ordinarily from the British film studios of the time. It was little wonder that David Schrire was prompted to suggest that the film was "romanticised" and "escapist" and that "Grierson dealt with actual industry or occupation but ran away from its social meaning". Schrire put the argument against the film most cogently when he said:

Remember the contempt Grierson had for the actual marketing of the fish, the regret he appeared to express that the fish, the fruit of the glorious adventurous fishermen, was bought and sold for money. Shouldn't his protest have been that the fish was often thrown back into the sea, or used as manure, because of the economic system which did not allow people to afford to buy it?²⁰

Clearly the projection of Britain in this film at least was limited and partial in the extreme, and every bit as manipulated as were the images conjured up by the newsreels.

But what of the anti-aesthetic element to Grierson's concept of the documentary? Once more it crops up endlessly in his writings:

Documentary was from the beginning an "anti-aesthetic" movement...[It was] an essentially British development. Its characteristic was the idea of social use, and there, I believe, is the only reason why our British documentary persisted when other aesthetic or aestheticky movements in

20. As quoted in Rotha, Documentary Diary, p.30.

the same direction were either fitful or failed...It permitted the national talent for emotional understatement to operate in a medium not given to understatement.²¹

The true irony here is that the most enduring monuments to Grierson's documentary ideal turn out to be no more than his films such as "Coalface", made in 1935, or "Night Mail", made in 1936, the films in which he utilised the full powers of cinematic expression towards a thoroughgoing artistic creation.

For both films Grierson personally brought in Benjamin Britten to write the music and W.H. Auden to contribute the verse. "Coalface" was presented as "a new experiment in sound" and "a film oratorio".²² It used natural sound, and a recitative chorus of male voices along with a choir of male and female voices provided the background. A poem, written by Auden, was sung by the female voices to herald the return of the miners to the surface and it read in part:

O lurcher-loving collier, black as night,
Follow your love across the smokeless hill;
Your lamp is out and all your cages still;
Course for her heart and do not miss,
For Sunday soon is past and, Kate, fly not so fast,
For Monday comes when none may kiss:
Be marble to his soot, and to his black be white.²³

21. Ibid., p.43.

22. Ibid., p.131.

23. As quoted in Rotha, Documentary Diary, p.131.

For all the beauty of "Coalface", one is tempted to suggest that Grierson's use of the word "realism" to describe his films is singularly inappropriate in this instance.

Prospero would have been closer to the point in describing it as "such stuff as dreams are made on".

The renowned "Night Mail", which was made one year later, goes in for a similar sort of effect. Auden's words once again ring loud and clear, only this time there is an even greater use of editorial juxtaposition between visuals, commentary and music, which builds up to give the idea of the Night Mail speeding upon its way to Scotland.

Past cotton grass and moorland boulder,
Shoveling white steam over her shoulder,
Snorting noisily as she passes
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.²⁴

Roger Manvell called it "industrial romanticism";²⁵ even fellow documentary film-maker Paul Rotha said it had a "sentimental narration", and likened it to an earlier Grierson success called "Industrial Britain", which had been read according to Rotha "with heart-throb emotion by the actor Donald Calthrop".²⁶ One can only assume that on this earlier occasion Grierson had not considered Donald Calthrop to be one of those "lily-fingered Piccadilly actors" he talked about so often.

24. As quoted in Richard Dyer MacCann, The People's Films, New York 1973, p.24.

25. Ibid.

26. Rotha, Documentary Diary, p.133.

However of all the contemporary critics of the documentary film movement Arthur Calder-Marshall came closest to the point when, in 1937, he called the films "false-to-life, true-to-life documentaries" and stated that the film makers were "conducting propaganda of the most reactionary all's-right-with-the-world type".²⁷ But what more could honestly have been expected of Grierson's concept of documentary? For there were, inherent in the documentary movement, elements which militated strongly against Grierson ever realising his aims and, in particular, against his most grandiose claim for some sort of affinity between the "realism" in his films, and the left of the British political spectrum at the time. Indeed these elements were to ensure that the documentary film remained as much a part of the establishment, and what Tom Harrisson called "the organs of supposed power", as were the newsreels.

It was one of Grierson's closest collaborators, W.H. Auden, who showed the unlikelihood of this political affinity ever materialising, when he put forward for consideration two arguments which revealed the elements militating against it. The first stated that "sponsorship by Government Departments and industrial companies will never permit a truthful account of their people"; the second that "British documentary directors are upper middle

27. As quoted by Rotha in Documentary Diary, p.140 from Arthur Calder-Marshall, The Changing Scene, London 1937.

class and never likely to understand workers".²⁸ The latter argument, a question of class, is very difficult to substantiate without at least some modification of Auden's bald statement. But the patronage assertion is easily substantiated.

It is true, for example, that the Empire Marketing Board had been set up to encourage Empire trade and the sale of Empire goods in Great Britain. The E.M.B. Film Unit had to fulfil both these functions. Similarly, of its successor, the G.P.O. Film Unit, Arthur Calder-Marshall could justifiably claim that "Mr. Grierson is not paid to tell the truth but to make people use the parcel post", and that:

They are paid for by the Government to publicise Government services. The scandalous working conditions in the G.P.O. are not mentioned in their films. All we hear is of the wonderful efficiency, the huge expansion of business handled...In the films, as elsewhere, progressive tendencies are muzzled, not by complete suppression but by semi-expression.²⁹

Of the Grierson films made after 1935, which in his own words "showed the common man, not in the romance of his calling, but in the more complex and intimate drama of his citizenship",³⁰ even of these films the same criticisms

28. W.H. Auden, "Auden on Documentary", World Film News, Vol.1, No.1, April 1936, p.23.

29. As quoted in Rotha, Documentary Diary, p.139.

30. Ibid., p.273.

could justifiably be made. These were films such as "Workers and Jobs" and "Housing Problems", where the aesthetic qualities of something like "Night Mail" were replaced by a more journalistic, fact-finding approach. Even there the best that could be said was that:

They were quietly Labour-orientated films, paid for by a Conservative government, and according to Cavalcanti they were tolerated only because of their modest approach.³¹

As Alan Lovell has pointed out, Grierson's original list of supposed spiritual and political compatriots contained two different ideologies. There was an "outsider's" ideology represented by the Clydeside Movement and the I.L.P.; and there was an "insider's" ideology represented by Keynes, L.S.E. and P.E.P. In the final analysis "there is a certain contradiction in being attached to both"³² and there can be no escaping the fact that Grierson consciously chose to be on the "inside", although he knew his actions would be limited by government patronage. Furthermore as Lovell has concluded:

Although the documentary movement can be placed with the "social reform" tradition, it is curiously at odds with it on a crucial point, its empiricism. The "reality" that the documentary movement set out to capture in its films was self-evident, it

31. Isaksson and Furhammer, Politics and Film, p.78.

32. Alan Lovell, "Notes on British Film Culture", Screen Vol.13, No.2, Summer 1972, p.14.

did not need to be patiently discovered through the detailed observation, and statistical techniques of the social reformers. It consisted of the growth of technology and its rational application. The documentarists had a mythical belief in this as representing the main current of history. "Reality" was quite unproblematical for them.³³

But Auden's point about the documentary film directors being "upper middle class" and thereby unable to understand the subjects of their films has to be approached very carefully. One has to establish first of all that these men were indeed upper middle class then, secondly, that this factor, if true, necessarily disqualified them from an understanding of the working class. The education which the documentary film directors received might just bear out Auden's first point. For example, Sir Arthur Elton was educated at Marlborough and Cambridge before he joined Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board; Stuart Legg at Marlborough College then St. John's College; Basil Wright was at Sherborne and Corpus Christi, Cambridge; Cavalcanti, born in Rio de Janeiro, went to the Geneva Fine Arts School; even self-confessed "lesser mortals" like Paul Rotha and Harry Watt were educated at the Slade School and Edinburgh University respectively; Grierson himself went to Glasgow University and secured a Rockefeller Scholarship which took him to the United States and Chicago

33. Ibid. .

University.³⁴ Of course education alone does not make any man "upper middle class", Grierson was after all the son of a school-master. But they did thereby constitute an elite, an elite it must be said which was very similar in origins to the elite of men who ran the newsreel companies. And to that extent Auden's argument about class is well founded.

However the further implication to be drawn from Auden's point about class, namely that as an elite these men were necessarily disqualified from "understanding the workers", is highly debatable. For it could be argued, as Stuart Hood has done quite successfully, that the documentary film-makers were capable of an understanding but that this understanding simply idealised and romanticised the reality of the situation, with the result that their subjects were still far removed from the original context. It was not so much a lack of understanding then but more a misconception which led Grierson and his colleagues "to aestheticise reality, to aestheticise labour and the ordinary man and woman".³⁵

It would appear that several questions which were

34. Alan Lovell and Jim Hillier, Studies in Documentary, London 1972, pp.57-61.

35. Stuart Hood, Review of Documentary Diary, p.58; for further exposition on Hood's belief that this led simply to a new stereotype of the working class being created, see p.127.

posed at the outset of this chapter could now be answered, at least as far as the documentary film movement in this country was concerned. Having briefly assessed the character of the men and the organisations at the heart of the movement at the time, and their goals, it would seem that they were as much an expression of semi-official propaganda as the newsreels. Furthermore the image of Britain which they projected was far removed from the reality of the events and issues which preoccupied British society during this period. If indeed a gap had appeared, or was likely to appear, between the "organs of supposed power in Britain and the mass of non-vociferous Britishers" then it was not at all likely that the documentary would go far towards filling it.

Of course there were documentary film companies other than the ones which Grierson controlled. Generally though they were patronised by industrial companies and encountered restraints by virtue of that patronage. In 1934, for instance, the Shell Marketing and Refining Company formed the Shell Film Unit, with Edgar Anstey in charge. Between 1936 and 1939 the Strand Film Company, with Paul Rotha then Stuart Legg in charge of production, made about eighty films for various sponsors including the National Council of Social Services, the National Book Council, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and numerous government departments. Basil Wright established the Realist Film Unit in 1937 and produced films for The Times Publishing Company,

the League of Nations and the British Commercial Gas Association among others.³⁶ But the problems were always the same. As Ivor Montagu commented:

I knew that I couldn't make political statements in films that would reach the general public because of all the barriers that there were...because in the political sense they were working for either Government sponsors or rich multi-million companies...To reach the screen you had to be so restrained with it.³⁷

Montagu experienced for himself the sort of problems which were encountered by anybody who tried to put forward a different message from the one which emanated generally from the media at the time:

We made a little film called "Britain Expects" about the bombing of Potato Jones who ran the blockade up to Bilbao and then no cinema would put it on...We used every influence we could; I managed to get the Duchess of Atholl to persuade the ABC to try it in six theatres. The reason the trade refused to put it on was that they said it wasn't the sort of film the British public wanted. No controversy was ever supposed to come into the cinema...³⁸

It was for that very reason that the Progressive Film Institute was founded, to distribute films which might ordinarily not have been shown. Montagu and his wife ran

36. MacCann, The People's Films, p.25.

37. Interview with Ivor Montagu in Screen, Vol.13, No.3, Autumn 1972, pp.89-90.

38. Ibid., p.90.

it and, in his words, "A bunch of people in the Labour movement came in and were directors of the Institute".³⁹ To some extent the Progressive Film Institute, alone in the film world, did offer an alternative outlet of information on the pressing issues of the day. It showed the many films on Spain which Montagu helped to direct in 1938, films such as "Defence of Madrid", "Spanish ABC", "Behind the Spanish Lines", "Testimony of Non-Intervention" and "Britain Expects", as well as the film he made for the Communist Party in Britain which was entitled "Peace and Plenty". In addition it showed films from Republican Spain, "Anti-fascist films...from Germany or France" and "one or two newsreel type pictures of strikes, demonstrations by the unemployed, Party Congresses".⁴⁰ Yet because it could not get a general cinema release for any of its films, its potential audience was small, being confined entirely to showings in miners' halls, Co-op halls and other similar venues. So despite the fact that the documentary film movement did offer one alternative outlet of information in the form of the Progressive Film Institute, the grip of monopoly upon the film industry was still so strong that the potential of the latter body for disseminating information was severely limited.

Of course the feature film industry had little interest in news or current affairs, or indeed in

39. Ibid., p.94.

40. Ibid., p.95.

disseminating information, though they were interested in projecting Britain through their films, as has been seen already from Balcon's comments. To this end their fictional productions rigorously avoided anything which might possibly be construed as controversial. If they did not, then the British Board of Film Censors could always officially invoke its powers to ensure they did, as George Elvin noted in 1939:

Although the British Board of Film Censors is a trade organisation it is generally accepted that there is close contact between Government Departments and that body. The recent statement that the B.B.F.C. could hold out no hope of a certificate being granted to the proposed production of "The Relief of Lucknow" bears this out. Lord Tyrrell's official statement said that "the B.B.F.C. has been advised by all the authorities responsible for the Government of India, both civil and military, that in their considered opinion such a film would revive memories of the days of conflict in India, which it has been the earnest endeavour of both countries to obliterate, with a view to promoting harmonious co-operation between the two peoples."⁴¹

Elvin considered that "Mayfair drawing-room dramas are the only safe bet to get past the Censor" and that the film industry would therefore never live up to the obligations laid upon it by Oliver Stanley during the Films Act debates in the House of Commons. For on that occasion Stanley had said he wanted "the world to be able to see British films true to British life, accepting British standards, and

41. Elvin, "This Freedom", p.144.

spreading British ideals."⁴² The obvious implication of Elvin's criticism was that so long as the feature films concerned themselves solely with Mayfair drawing-room dramas then the picture of Britain so presented would be partial and depict only one side of British life and class. And of course the feature film projection of Britain during the late thirties was decidedly class-ridden, mostly in favour of the upper and middle classes, and generally at the expense of the working class.

The reputation of the Gaumont-Gainsborough studios, for example, had been founded on the basis of the Hitchcock films, the Jessie Matthews musicals, the Jack and Cicely Courtneidge comedies, the George Arliss films, and the historical epics which were made in the wake of the immensely successful "Private Life of Henry VIII". Similarly the reputation of the Ealing studios had been made in the first instance by Basil Dean whilst extolling the virtues of one class and laughing at the foibles of another. As Thorold Dickinson put it:

The mainstay of the Ealing films up to that time (1938) had been the music-hall personalities Gracie Fields and George Formby, and the rest of their product had been greatly influenced by the English theatre both before and behind the camera.⁴³

42. As quoted in Elvin, "This Freedom", p.142.

43. As quoted in Barr, "Projecting Britain and the British character", p.94.

But in 1938 Dean left Ealing to be replaced by Michael Balcon, who took over control of production. In turn Balcon brought in a host of film directors from the ranks of the documentary film-makers including Alberto Cavalcanti, Harry Watt, Pat Jackson, Robert Hamer and Thorold Dickinson, although the latter had already made films for the Ealing studios. They proceeded to create a feature film studio very similar to the one they had left in the documentary ranks. As Cavalcanti commented:

I was as happy at Ealing as I had been at the GPO. It was a good atmosphere in part because of the boys I took in such as Watt and Hamer...The co-operation at Ealing was very similar to that at the GPO...Ealing was an exact parallel to the GPO as far as I am concerned.⁴⁴

In fact the parallels were stronger than Cavalcanti intimated. For from 1938 onwards the Ealing studios paralleled the documentary movement exactly in aims, experience and results. Over the next few years and during the Second World War this band of ex-documentary men graduated from propaganda shorts, to "dramatised" documentary and finally to the more orthodox fictional films. In the process they managed to change the face of Ealing and the projection of Britain which it presented to the world. As in their documentary work they now presented a serious image, especially of the working class. Yet in the final analysis

44. Cavalcanti interview, p.45.

the result was the same. They simply rejected one set of working class stereotypes for a new set of stereotypes, of their own making. The comic face disappeared for a while but the idealised image replaced it. That in turn was ultimately supplanted by the combined humour and caricature of the celebrated Ealing comedies.

Of course the ex-documentary men were not the only people working at Ealing but their new found colleagues were of a similar ilk:

They were of the generation which passed through the depression and was radicalised by it, producing a desire to show "the people" in films. Both personal knowledge and the demands of entertainment narrative confirmed them in the choice of this class fraction as an area of interest.⁴⁵

These new colleagues also shared a similar educational background. Robert Hamer, T.E.B. Clarke, Charles Crichton and Charles Frend at Oxbridge; Alexander Mackendrick and Michael Relph at art colleges; Henry Cornelius, who was born in South Africa, at Max Reinhardt's academy in Berlin and the Sorbonne.⁴⁶

But their radicalism, as John Ellis has pointed out, was "a radicalism born out of humanitarianism, a response to a failure of the system rather than a challenge to it."⁴⁷

45. John Ellis, "Made in Ealing", Screen, Vol.16, No.1, Spring 1975, p.122.

46. Ibid., p.120.

47. Ibid.

Some of the Ealing band, men like Ivor Montagu, Sid Cole and Thorold Dickinson, were committed to the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, for instance, and had gone to make short films there. Dickinson, furthermore, was a member of the A.C.T. delegation to Russia in 1937. Yet, in the final analysis, again as Ellis has noted:

? The limits of this radicalism are demonstrated by the post-war careers of these people; there was an acute suspicion of the left as somehow dehumanised (the product of Stalinism) which led Dickinson to make "Secret People", viciously condemning a group which attempts to assassinate a fascist dictator. It also leads to comments like Balcon's "Ivor Montagu was a great character, no doubt a member of the Communist Party, but he was the sweetest, nicest, gentlest man that ever happened."⁴⁸

In fact politics hardly ever entered into their life at the Ealing studios. Balcon has one anecdote which recounts that Mary Kessel used to sell the Daily Worker but that he had an arrangement with her whereby she would sell it outside the studio gate and not inside. Both people were quite happy with the arrangement because first and foremost, in his words, "we were film-makers, it was our life, it was our total life."⁴⁹

Perhaps Cavalcanti unwittingly summed up the ambivalent nature of the Ealing studios' success under Balcon's direction when he commented:

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., p.118.

When I got to Ealing the bread and butter of the house was Gracie Fields and George Formby. I cannot bear Miss Gracie Fields. I thought quite highly of Hays and Formby but I could not forgive Miss...that, that girl. To make fun of popular songs...When Miss Gracie Fields made funny noises when singing, it made me furious. I couldn't bear the woman at all. For my punishment she lives in Capri, and I have a house there too, and consequently I frequently see her.⁵⁰

Ealing under Balcon and Cavalcanti did indeed displace Miss Gracie Fields, though she went on to display her enormous talents for other studios. But the true irony is that Cavalcanti appears not to appreciate that ultimately both he and Gracie Fields were in the same business of entertainment. They were both a part of the same establishment, a show business establishment, and finally both lived to enjoy the fruits of success in their respective houses on Capri.

On the face of it the B.B.C. represented quite a different establishment. It held a monopoly on radio broadcasting in this country and therefore had no need to compete for its audience, though of course it had to build up an audience in the first place and it seems that weekend continental broadcasts did make some impression on listening figures.⁵¹ However, because of this virtual monopoly the

50. Cavalcanti interview, p.46.

51. Political and Economic Planning, Report on the British Press, London 1938, p.257.

B.B.C. was therefore in a position to dictate its own standards of broadcasting. The result was that:

In the United States radio, the cinema, the gramophone record industry, even the press, all belonged to the same world of "mass entertainment". In Britain the B.B.C. did not belong to that world. It was not "a factory of dreams". It reflected life, even if it reflected it imperfectly. Given the wide social and geographical divisions in Britain, it had a limited if useful role as the interpreter of one part of "the great audience" to another.⁵²

Furthermore it was during this period that the B.B.C. began to build up its reputation, particularly in the realm of news broadcasting, for being impartial and objective. As the Report on the British Press commented:

Sober news is found in perhaps its purest form in the news bulletins of the B.B.C., which, in the words of its news editor, "sets before itself the useful but nevertheless limited ideal of giving to the public a sober and accurate summary of the news which it receives from the four news agencies which are mentioned at least once a week."⁵³

Yet for all the B.B.C.'s success, no doubt justified, it is noticeable that both of the last-quoted commentaries readily admit that it was limited in scope. And there are two probable reasons why this proved to be the case; one stems from the personality of Sir John Reith, the man in charge of the B.B.C., and the other stems from the fact

52. Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless, p.8.

53. P.E.P., Report on the British Press, p.155.

that the B.B.C. was afflicted by pressures of the public and governmental varieties over potentially controversial matters, in much the same way that the newsreels were.

Most of the problems on the latter front seem to have arisen in the relations between the B.B.C.'s Talks Department and the Foreign Office on issues relating to Germany and Russia. Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, and Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, appear for instance to have been instrumental in causing the departure of Vernon Bartlett from the B.B.C., as a result of two talks which he gave as foreign correspondent. His talks were held by some critics to have been pro-German in tone.⁵⁴ Similarly Vansittart maintained that a talk given by John Hilton on Russia in 1937 was also biased.⁵⁵

In fact Vansittart proved to be a continual thorn in the flesh of the B.B.C. For recent research has shown that in 1935 he was one of the men who put pressure upon the B.B.C., successfully as it turned out, to prevent a series of talks which were to be broadcast under the title of "The Citizen and his Government". These talks were meant to assess "the adequacy of the British system today to give effect to the demands and needs of the Britisher" and were destined to include contributions from Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, and Harry Pollitt,

54. Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless, p.146.

55. Ibid., p.147.

secretary of the British Communist Party.⁵⁶ Vansittart held that "It is typical of this country that the B.B.C. should persevere with this silly idea".⁵⁷ The programmes were scotched. When confronted by government pressure from men with opinions of this sort, the B.B.C. proved to be as limited in its potential for disseminating information as were any other of the media. Orwell's criticism that there were "forbidden areas" of discussion was on the face of it justified. Although in these instances the "censorship" was caused not so much by "the grip of monopoly on radio", which was certainly held by the B.B.C., but more by the direct interference of the government upon a supposedly free medium of communication.

In attempting to assess the impact of broadcasting on British society, in "the divided society of the inter-war years, divided by age, by class, by education, and by region", Asa Briggs has concluded that the greatest measure of success was that more and more people came "to accept radio as a part of life's routine".⁵⁸ Yet at the same time he has qualified his conclusion by adding:

It is fair to say that it was more effective in its geographical than in its social mediation, in pulling together the different parts of the country than in pulling together

56. Brenda Swann and Maureen Turnbull, "The day they gagged the B.B.C.", in the Sunday Times, February 13, 1972.

57. Ibid.

58. Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless, pp.6-7.

the different classes.⁵⁹

And perhaps the main reason why the B.B.C. achieved only a partial success lay in the image of Britain which it projected through its programmes and the image of Britain which it constituted in itself.

In order to assess fully the projection of Britain on the first front, one would need to examine carefully the content of the B.B.C.'s programmes throughout the whole of the period under review, and that is beyond the scope of the present cursory examination. However it is sufficient to say that despite the reputation which the B.B.C. achieved for objectivity and impartiality, there is still enough evidence to suggest that it was prevented, by external factors which affected the media generally, from presenting a complete picture of both British and foreign affairs.

The projection of Britain which the organisation constituted in itself was very much determined by one man, Sir John Reith, who was "the outstanding personality in the B.B.C. throughout the period from 1927 to 1938".⁶⁰ And it was he who turned the B.B.C. into an institution of the establishment with an image which, as has already been noted, was "as British as the Bank of England". It proved to be a particular kind of institution, "an autonomous institution, as unlike a government department as it was unlike a retail

59. Ibid., p.8.

60. Ibid., p.19.

store".⁶¹ Furthermore it seems that by Reith's departure the B.B.C. had gathered a momentum of its own and that by 1938 it was "something more than a projection of Reith".⁶² Nevertheless one might not so easily have noticed the existence of the latter factor in 1938. For as one critic has recently said of Reith, in reviewing The Reith Diaries:

He set the B.B.C. into a rigid mould which has taken years to shake off, because he mesmerised the world into mistakenly accepting that no one else could have built the B.B.C. as well as he.⁶³

It is the public image of an organisation which most of all determines how people will react to it. And Reith invested the B.B.C. with the image of being yet another institution of the establishment. The image may not indeed have been justified. By 1938 the B.B.C. may well have manifested an outlook independent of both its mentor and external influence. Yet it is interestingly enough an image which has persisted to this very day.⁶⁴

On the face of it the British newspaper press was in the best position of all the media of communication

61. Ibid., p.9.

62. Ibid., p.18.

63. Woodrow Wyatt, Review of The Reith Diaries, in the Sunday Times, September 21, 1975.

64. For a discussion on the impartiality of the B.B.C. news and current affairs, with particular regard to coverage of union and industrial affairs in the week January 8-14, 1971, see One Week, a survey conducted by the ACTT Television Commission, London 1971.

which were in existence in this country during the period of the 1930s. After all it was a medium devoted almost entirely to the propagation of fact and opinion on news and current affairs concerning the pressing issues of the day. One might therefore expect the press to have offered the most complete and rounded picture of the events it covered. And indeed, in comparison with film and radio, it did so. However, for all that, it is noticeable that selection and manipulation of the news were still prevailing factors in the press world.

To begin with, it was not possible for the British press to focus its attention on all the major issues and topics of concern at one and the same time. Therefore the newspapers had to determine where their emphasis would lie, and which topics would merit most attention and coverage. To this extent the press exercised selection. As the Report on the British Press put it:

Effective public opinion, which in specialised issues may depend on the reactions of a remarkably small number of men and women, cannot be focused on many subjects at once. To take a simple example, people find it impossible to be effectively indignant about Spain, China, Abyssinia and Austria all at once. The Press therefore, wields an immensely powerful weapon in its power to influence the choice of the issue on which public opinion shall make itself felt at any one time.⁶⁵

Manipulation, or influence on the treatment of the news selected for coverage, appeared from the same sorts of

65. P.E.P., Report on the British Press, p.33.

quarters which affected the newsreels and their treatment of the news:

The internal influences are those operating inside the newspaper office, for example the personalities of the proprietor, editor and other chief executives and the conscious or unconscious bias of those who actually collect and write up the news. The external influences are varied, and include pressure that may be exercised by banks, advertisers, the Government, churches and other institutions, and the impersonal influence of the law.⁶⁶

Of course it was when the press came to deal with important social, political and economic issues that proprietorial and editorial influences were most felt and on those occasions political allegiances manifested themselves very strongly.

Adherence to one or other political line showed itself to be a prominent characteristic of the British press in a way that was not so obviously revealed by the other media of the time. The Times was Conservative, generally supported the National Government, and indeed by the mid 1930s "had gained the reputation of being an official spokesman for the British Government".⁶⁷ The Daily Telegraph was Conservative and supported the National Government. The Daily Mail was Right-Wing Conservative and pro-Nazi Germany; the Daily Express was Independent Conservative and Imperialist; the News Chronicle was Liberal; and the

66. Ibid., p.19.

67. Gannon, The British Press and Germany, p.70

Daily Herald was the official Labour Party newspaper. The other important daily newspaper was the Manchester Guardian which was Independent Liberal.⁶⁸

Yet despite their various and conflicting political affinities, there was one thing, it seems, on which all the British newspapers agreed. For, as Franklin Reid Gannon has noted, "the common experience of all the journalists and editors of the period was the Great War".⁶⁹ And it is Gannon's contention that hatred and detestation of the Great War, coupled with a desire to ensure that no war like it might ensue, were the features which determined the general attitude of the British press towards the numerous European crises of the 1930s. Furthermore, he suggests, they were factors which governed the attitudes of press, politicians and public alike:

The genuine liberal legacy of the war was the universal determination that it must never happen again; and the realisation that care and vigilance would have to be exerted to avoid such a repetition.

By an early date, then, both the Left and the Right had come to a shared abhorrence of war and a determination that it must never again be allowed to happen.⁷⁰

It will be seen that similar feelings pervaded the newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War.

68. P.E.P., Report on the British Press, pp.114-121; Gannon, The British Press and Germany, pp.32-88.

69. Gannon, The British Press and Germany, p.5.

70. Ibid., p.6.

This then was the general media context within which the newsreels operated during the period. Within such a context the newsreels' capacity for covering and reporting the news should not be under-estimated or devalued in comparison with the other news-bearing media, though obviously they did not cover the news as copiously or as fully as the newspaper press. The internal and external influences which brought about the selection and manipulation of the news by the newsreels, thereby affecting the quality of their coverage, were inherent factors in the media structure generally, with the same results for one and all. They worked within the same boundaries and limitations. And these factors and limitations led men like Orwell and Harrison to believe that the media of their day constituted little more than "the organs of supposed power" and the voice of the establishment. Moreover because the media organisations were controlled by monopolistic concerns, the picture of Britain which they projected must therefore be partial and elitist. In Tom Harrison's words, they were hardly likely to fill the "dangerous gap" between "the ordinary and non-vocal masses of Britain and a highly specialised set of organs and organisations speaking for all."

Of course there were alternative outlets of information which came into existence with the purpose of attempting to fill this widening gap, and they generally arose from the Left of the political spectrum. The presence of the Progressive Film Institute within the film industry has already been noted. In the publishing realms the birth

of Penguin books in 1935, in particular of Penguin Specials in 1938, and The Left Book Club in May 1936 all testified, by their surprising sales success, to the need for such ventures. The three Lane brothers, who ran Penguins, found that their initial print-runs of 20,000 per edition had risen within three years to 50,000.⁷¹ A Penguin Special political tract like Searchlight on Spain, by the Duchess of Atholl, ran through several editions. Victor Gollancz, the publisher of The Left Book Club, expected a few thousand members. He had 12,000 within a month and 50,000 in a year.⁷²

Stuart Hall has argued that the Penguin Specials, The Left Book Club, and in particular books like Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier and to some extent Homage to Catalonia, were all manifestations of what he calls "the engaged social eye" and that this form of "literary documentary and rapportage" led to a different "way of seeing":

This literature was often turned towards the same subject-matter--the common people, their habits and actions, their plight and condition--and with many of the same attitudes: the effort to set down, record and report what was "actually there", to break through the crust of tradition and inherited social sightlessness which kept half--the greater half--of England such a well-guarded secret

71. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940, London 1966, (First edition London 1955), p.526.

72. Ibid.

from the other--the lesser, more powerful, half.⁷³

Hall actually includes the photo-news magazine, Picture Post, among the ranks of this socially engaged literature. Its first issue appeared on October 1, 1938, under the editorship of Stefan Lorant who persuaded the Hulton Press to print it. Its editor during the years from 1940 to 1950 was Tom Hopkinson who tried hard to invest it with an independently-minded and critical standpoint. He did this by engaging a host of outstanding journalists to write for the magazine, and by the clever use of stories such as his own defence of free speech in wartime ("Should We Stop Criticising?" in 1940), and the many series on unemployment ("The Unemployed", 1939; "This Is The Problem", 1941). Once again the immediate commercial success of Picture Post showed that there was a large enough audience to support such a venture. There was a print order of a million within two months of its publication and 1,350,000 within four months.⁷⁴

Tom Harrisson's own organisation, Mass Observation, which he founded with Charles Madge in 1937, is also considered by Stuart Hall to be another engaged social eye since it was "a movement devoted to observing and recording the infinite variety of social habits of the British

73. Stuart Hall, "**The Social Eye of Picture Post**", Working Papers in Cultural Studies No.2, Spring 1972, p.99.

74. Ibid., p.73.

people".⁷⁵ This was the way in which Harrisson believed he could make British society more aware of the gap which he saw as existing between one half of the populace and the other. Furthermore it was his belief that the traditional media of communication obviously could not be expected to fulfil such a function since they were, as we have seen, more inclined to favour a different projection of Britain. His intention, therefore, was that "the telescope of attention should, in such perilous times, be directed towards the British people themselves" and the method was:

To observe the mass and seek to have the mass observe itself; the first by field study...the second through self-documentation and "subjective" rapportage.⁷⁶

Apart from establishing certain minor statistical findings, such as the number of times men sitting together in pubs drank their pints in unison, Mass Observation produced some notable and worthwhile surveys including one on "Home Propaganda", conducted during World War II,⁷⁷ and another on public opinion during the Munich crisis.⁷⁸

Mass Observation, then, was one of several alternative

75. Ibid., p.98.

76. Ibid.

77. "Home Propaganda, A Report prepared by Mass Observation in Change No.2, Bulletin of the Advertising Service Guild, November 1941.

78. Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, Britain by Mass Observation, Harmondsworth 1939.

outlets of information which did attempt to fill in the gaps, at least as far as the media were concerned, within a divided British society from 1935 onwards. Although, ironically, they also emphasised the divisions by revealing the full extent and the ramifications of these divisions more closely. And Britain was indeed divided during this period, no more so than on the political front during the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War imposed itself on a divided Britain and at the same time it caused further divisions. To a great extent this twifold action explains the response of both politicians and public alike to the war in Spain. Their response in turn determined the reaction of the British media to the Spanish Civil War.

The twifold divisive action is a factor emphasised over and over again by commentators and historians alike in their attempts to account for the effect of the Spanish Civil War upon British political and public opinion, and the subsequent reactions which it prompted. K.W. Watkins notes, for instance:

The problem of the Spanish Civil War was imposed on a Britain already deeply divided internally and facing a menacing European situation, a Britain which was thus incapable of evolving a straightforward and united policy towards the events in the Iberian peninsula.⁷⁹

79. K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided, p.70.

During the actual course of the Civil War, Winston Churchill commented upon the divisions which it caused among politicians and the inevitable reaction which ensued when he wrote in an article on April 5, 1938:

As between Spanish Nationalists and Republicans, British sympathies are divided. Strong elements in the Conservative Party regard the cause of Franco as their own. All the Parties of the "Left" feel outraged by its triumph. But only a small minority would have urged that Britain should actively intervene, and in fact the division is so deep and balanced that no coherent action was at any time possible.⁸⁰

Of course Churchill was writing in the midst of the crisis and anyway changed his mind on several occasions throughout the course of the War. However on that particular occasion he does appear to have made an astute summary of the situation. Once again, K.W. Watkins makes exactly the same points, only on a larger scale, when he adds:

It is, in fact, arguable that nothing since the French Revolution had so tragically divided the British people as the Spanish Civil War, and that at a moment when unity was more necessary than at any time in Britain's history. In so doing it contributed greatly to the impotence of Britain in attempting to stave off the ultimate conflict.⁸¹

But then if the feelings aroused by the onset of war in Spain were so strongly felt in Britain and if the divisions

80. Winston Churchill, Step by Step, London 1939, p.227.

81. K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided, pp.11-12.

ran so deep, why was no coherent action possible and why was Britain reduced to a state of impotence?

The answer appears to be that at the outset of the war Britain did take action, at least insofar as there was a policy to pursue a course of inaction. As C.L. Mowat put it:

The first reaction of the British Government, and of all shades of British opinion, to the outbreak of the civil war was one of neutrality.⁸²

Such a response is not difficult to understand. There was after all one basic feeling common to all shades of opinion in this country and that was a deep hatred of war, particularly in the light of the experiences of the Great War, and there was no great desire to embark upon a course of action which might involve armed intervention in Spain and another World War. It was an emotion shared by the men who ran the newspapers and the media, as Franklin Reid Gannon's comments have already suggested. Indeed it was a feeling shared by everybody:

Politicians and people who had lived through the First World War were haunted by the ghosts of that earlier halocaust. It was not the theoretical pacifism of a minority, but a deep-rooted desire for peace, for peace at almost any price, that permeated nations.⁸³

82. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between The Wars, pp.573-574.

83. K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided, pp.71-72.

In addition the Government could always maintain, with ample justification in 1936, that Britain was at a low level of military preparedness and therefore was not in a position for military intervention, even if it wished to do so. But in July 1936 it would seem that such arguments were not needed because the cause of neutrality was acceptable to all since it was the best way to avoid a general European war:

Thus at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War appeasement, which had yet to acquire the distinctive connotation with which Chamberlain was to endow it, was still seen by many as the first aim of foreign policy.⁸⁴

And if neutrality was seen as the best way to avoid a general war, then, again as everybody agreed, a policy of non-intervention was the best way to maintain neutrality because if "in 1936 few people accepted war as inevitable", then "non-intervention at least postponed it".⁸⁵ The Government quite naturally welcomed non-intervention since, with France, it instigated the policy. And the Labour party approved non-intervention at its Edinburgh conference in October, 1936, as long as it was to be made effective and binding upon both sides in the conflict.⁸⁶

The overall result was that between the months of July and October in 1936 Britain followed a course of

84. Ibid., p.72.

85. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between The Wars, p.574.

86. Ibid.

determined isolationism with regard to the events which were going on in Spain. Of course during these important opening months of the conflict in Spain, when British public opinion was still being wooed one way or the other, the policy of determined isolationism was also being buttressed by the weight of the media. By the time that non-intervention began to reveal itself as being hopelessly inadequate to prevent foreign intervention in Spain and as working decidedly in favour of the Nationalists, the damage had been done. The impression of non-intervention had been left upon some of the news-bearing organisations and media structures.

Politically, it did not take long for neutrality and non-intervention to lose their credibility as effective policies. By the end of October, 1936, the failure of non-intervention was apparent,⁸⁷ and "the savagery with which the war was fought banished all sentiments of neutrality".⁸⁸ The Labour party began to despair of non-intervention and newspaper reports and editorials reflected political viewpoints on the conflict. It was then most of all that the full effects of the Spanish Civil War were reflected in British society:

It widened existing divisions, between government and opposition, between right and left (terms hardly used in the political sense in England before this); it brought

87. Ibid., p.575.

88. Ibid., p.574.

bitterness and class-consciousness into foreign policy, and so into domestic policies, to an extent unknown before. Division of opinion over the war in newspapers and pamphlets reflected and enlarged the wider cleavage. It led to a changing of sides over peace and war. The left became war-minded: the Spanish Civil War mobilised the non-trade-union sections of the Labour movement as Hitler's brutalities had already begun to mobilise the trade unions. The more this happened, the more the government moved away from war; peace with the dictators at almost any price seemed to be its policy. Non-intervention and pacifism crossed over from the opposition to the government: "no war" became the slogan, not of the left, but of the right. This increased the disunity of the country for a time, but helped to bring a united country into a war for its own survival in 1939.⁸⁹

In that extract C.L. Mowat attempted to describe what he saw as being the historical reality of the situation in Britain at the time. And there can be little doubt that he accurately summarised the deep, political divisions which arose in this country over the events in Spain. However, on one point, he could be said to have over-stated his case. For the news-bearing media did not all respond in the same way. Certainly it is true that the newspaper coverage of the Spanish Civil War only served to emphasise the cleavage in the British political response to Spain. So also did the pamphlet "war" which ensued. But it is not possible to conclude that because the newspaper and pamphlet press reflected and enlarged the political divisions, so also did

89. Ibid., pp.577-578.

the rest of the media. For in some quarters, notably among the newsreel companies, the Spanish Civil War was not a divisive issue. Furthermore it may well have been a divisive issue in the country at large, but it was certainly not shown to be so in the newsreel coverage. The newsreels never wavered from the impressions they had gained at the outset of the Spanish Civil War, and from the messages they laid down during the important, opening six months of the conflict. Of course these impressions and messages were modified on occasions, to fit the changing circumstances, but the government's policies of neutrality, to avoid war, and non-intervention, to preserve neutrality, remained viable propositions as far as the newsreels were concerned. There was no need, as C.L. Mowat suggests, for the country to go through a period of disunity before emerging re-united in 1939, in time to enter "a war for its own survival". In the eyes of the newsreels Britain during the years from 1936 to 1939 had never been anything but united.

Chapter 5The Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War:Before the War

Before the Civil War Spain was only sporadically covered by the British newsreels and rarely seen on the cinema screen. Such film reportage as there was only fleetingly dealt with the more important events that took place in Spain during the first thirty-five years of this century. Furthermore these were the years of the silent cinema when the newsreels had to depend upon a visual presentation of the events they depicted. They were allowed little in the way of comment since all that they had for further exposition were captions placed at the beginning of a story, and occasionally throughout its run, which amounted to no more than a bare description of the proceedings.

For all such drawbacks, a survey and subsequent viewing of the more significant Gaumont Graphic issues reveals that the silent forerunner to the Gaumont British News was one newsreel which did capture, albeit infrequently, some of the highlights and personalities of Spanish history. As early as October 8, 1917, Gaumont Graphic released a story under the title "Barcelona authorities prepare for trouble".¹ 1917 was indeed an eventful year for Barcelona although Gaumont's report does scant justice to it and reveals most of all the limitations of the earliest newsreels. The people of Catalonia had always desired some sort of separate recognition from the

1. Gaumont Graphic Issue No.684, 8/10/17. "Barcelona authorities prepare for trouble".

rest of Spain and after 1907 this desire had manifested itself in the formation of the Lliga Regionalista. After 1914, the Lliga, which was mainly supported by middle-class Catalans, endorsed a campaign for Catalan Home Rule with a Catalan parliament. But the Catalan question might never have exerted such a powerful influence over Spanish affairs at the turn of the century had it not also been for the fact that Barcelona had become the most industrialised city in Spain. And "the goals of middle-class Catalanism were to wrest regional autonomy from the centralised Spanish parliamentary system, protect and advance the region's economic interests and encourage the modernisation of Spain".² To this end the leaders of the Catalan Lliga, along with other small liberal groups, called an independent assembly to meet in Barcelona on July 19, 1917.

Again, in 1917, the two most powerful trade unions in Spain, the Anarchist C.N.T. and the Socialist U.G.T., combined in a revolutionary general strike. The U.G.T. issued a strike manifesto on August 12 and although support from the C.N.T., who did not actually sign the manifesto, was erratic, a general strike did spread from Barcelona to the rest of the country. Yet both the efforts of the Catalan Lliga and the trade unions in Barcelona ultimately came to nothing. Cambó, the leader of the Lliga, felt his hand was being forced by a general strike which he denounced as "a stupidity"³ and he

2. Stanley G. Payne, The Spanish Revolution, London 1970, p.37.

3. Raymond Carr, Spain 1808-1939, London 1970, p.504.

failed to carry a majority of the middle-classes, with the result that the government remained in the power of the established cliques. For their part, the trade unions could not rally broad support, particularly from the Army, and the strike died down after strong action by the police and the Army. This was the point at which Gaumont came in and their story reflected the ultimate show of strength by the combined armed forces with the ending of the strike. In fact by the time that Gaumont Graphic actually got around to releasing their story on Barcelona, most of the events in Spain had quietened down. However, Gaumont must at least get the credit for being in the right place with their cameras, if not at the right time.

By 1921 Spain was heavily committed to a strong military policy in Morocco and the Graphic covered their fortunes twice in that same year. The earliest of the two reports, shown in April 1921,⁴ contained film of "Spanish troops encamped at Sidi Dais" in Morocco. The other helped to foster the perennial image of Spain with a story on "Bull fights in Spain to raise funds for wounded from Morocco".⁵ It also contained shots from Morocco itself of General Silvestre who later in the year was prompted by King Alfonso XIII into a rash military action which led to the defeat at Anual. It is noticeable that Gaumont appear not to have covered the defeat itself when Silvestre's entire command

4. GG Issue No.1054, 21/4/21. "Spanish troops encamped at Sidi Dais".

5. GG Issue No.1099, 30/9/21. "Spanish troops in Morocco".

of twenty thousand men was caught by the Riff tribesmen under Abd el Krim and almost annihilated.

The crises engendered by the Catalan and Moroccan questions led on to the emergence of the dictator General Primo de Rivera in 1923. If the machinations and intricacies of how he took control in Spain were beyond the powers of presentation of Gaumont, at least they heralded his arrival with a story entitled "Revolution in Spain".⁶ But with the advent of sound recording on film, Gaumont, along with certain other newsreel companies, eventually extended their horizons. This technological accomplishment did not necessarily mean that there was to be an immediate increase in depth of news reporting, for there was still little room for editorial comment on the events depicted. The period from 1927 to 1932 was "the changeover period" when "sound technology was limited by the fact that only one track existed on which speeches, commentary, sound effects and music would have to fight for a place".⁷ The professional commentators did not really arrive on the newsreels until 1935. Yet the silent newsreel film is still of value as a record, though somewhat limited, of the people and places at the centre of activities in Spain before the very heart of newsreel reporting, the opinions and remarks of the commentators who overlaid the pictures, was to achieve prominence. During the changeover period the newsreels evidently felt the presence of sound to

6. GG Issue No.1304, 8/9/23. "Revolution in Spain".

7. Lisa Pontecorvo, Notes on Film Items, Open University Supplementary Material to A301 Television Programme 7, Milton Keynes 1973, p.28.

be such a novel and engaging phenomenon for the cinema audience with the result that it mattered little what was actually spoken.

So it was that the important events which took place in Spain on April 14, 1931, when a Republic was declared, were somewhat disappointingly covered on film. For a while the Gaumont company maintained both the silent Graphic as well as the new Sound News, and in fact it was on their silent newsreel that they released a story called "Spain: New Republic".⁸ On the other hand British Paramount News had a sound story entitled "Nation votes for Republic on Polling Day as King Alfonso abdicates".⁹ However Paramount's report contains little more than a series of captions to convey the gist of the narration. The opening title sets the scene with a headline that ran "Alfonso abdicates" followed by "Madrid. First pictures from Spain where scenes of wild disorder mark polling day. Nation votes for Republic." The accompanying film shows numerous shots of people talking and milling through the streets of Madrid, smiling and looking towards the camera, then there follows a scene of men looking at lists pinned upon a wall, only to be complemented by a view of crowds at the polls with voting slips in their hands.

The generally harmonious picture is broken by the next caption which proclaims "Riot. At the Puerta del Sol, Royal Police still loyal to the King clash with Republican crowds." Film of people retreating before mounted policemen

8. GG Issue No.2095, 20/5/31. "Spain: New Republic".

9. British Paramount Issue No.14, 16/4/31. "Nation votes for Republic on Polling Day as King Alfonso abdicates".

serves to convey some of the strong feelings aroused by the declaration of a Republic as do shots of police on foot, and armed with long batons, confronting and harassing civilians. The departing King Alfonso is brought into the fray after a title announcing "Dethroned. Ex-King Alfonso, with his English Queen and family, brings to an end the reign of the Bourbons." The newsreel footage which follows this title must have been culled from the Paramount stock-shot library for it shows Alfonso, in better times, on horseback and reviewing a contingent of troops. This, in turn, is succeeded by a caption stating "Spanish Reds riot. Fire and pillage. Mobs terrorise capital and wreck holy buildings as seething unrest sweeps country." There are then shots of mobs collecting firewood, looting houses and churches, and starting fires in the streets.

The story is concluded by "The new Republican leader, Senor Alcala Zamora, in an exclusive interview with Paramount Sound News." Alcala Zamora, a middle-of-the-road Catholic who turned to the ideals of a Republic late in the day, addresses the camera and there is a sound recording of his speech. But the novelty is all because he speaks in Spanish and there is no attempt either to translate or to convey the gist of his remarks. Considering the contemporary technical difficulties and the fact that there is no commentator on the story, it is not surprising there is no translation, but such deficiencies must have rendered the speech incomprehensible to the British cinemagoing audience. Throughout this report the soundtrack is totally naturalistic in

character, with little more than the sounds of voices in the street and the occasional shouts and yells.

A week after the story on the proclamation of a new Republic in Spain, Paramount took up the King's departure in their issue for April 23 with a piece entitled "Alfonso in England."¹⁰ In an attempt to capitalise upon British interest in Alfonso's English Queen, Paramount showed film of their arrival in London as "sympathetic crowds give exiled monarch a royal welcome." In contrast the report also contained headlines stating: "Citizens of a new regime. In Madrid, Republican throngs congregate to pay homage to the memory of Pablo Iglesias, the founder of Spanish Socialism." This was accompanied by film of crowds being addressed by a speaker, who remains unidentified, and the story closes with the crowd marching and singing.

The succeeding years, from 1931 to 1935, proved to be traumatic years in the political history of the Second Republic in Spain, but they seem to have escaped the notice of the British newsreels, perhaps because politics were not generally considered to be the most entertaining form of cinema. Universal News attempted to engender interest in the miners' riots in the Asturias with a report released on October 8, 1934,¹¹ apparently within a couple of days of the riots and subsequent fighting. It is not surprising, therefore, that the story turned out to be made up entirely of footage taken from their stock-shot library and it is not even film of the Asturias at all. It is little wonder then that the company

10. BP Issue No.16, 23/4/31. "Alfonso in England".

11. Universal News Issue No.443, 8/10/34. "Spanish Riots".

felt the necessity to slip it into their "News in Brief" section of the newsreel. The historian, Kenneth Watkins, has suggested that "It was the Asturian events which brought home and highlighted the Spanish situation for politically interested sections of the British people".¹² The Left in Britain were deeply affected by the harsh measures taken to suppress the uprising and Members of Parliament, such as the indefatigable Ellen Wilkinson, visited Spain in an attempt to assess the situation for themselves. Mrs. Leah Manning, who went as part of an official delegation, wrote a book on her experiences there in which she commented:

Such a campaign of hate as was described to us would have done credit to the Allied and German propaganda machines from 1914-1918.¹³

But to judge from the newsreel response alone, one would not have thought that "The event which had received the most publicity outside Spain, during the preceding years (i.e. before the Civil War) had been the Asturian revolt in October 1934."¹⁴ It might have been the case that the newsreel companies were not allowed into the area to film the riots, although there is no evidence to support such a view. What is more likely is that the newsreel companies simply did not cover the events in the Asturias because they would have conflicted with the generally harmonious picture which

12. Watkins, Britain Divided, p.25.

13. Leah Manning, What I Saw in Spain, London 1935, p.95.

14. Watkins, Britain Divided, p.15.

was being painted of Europe at the time. The evidence to support this view will be discussed shortly. In the event Universal were notably forthcoming in putting any impression of the Asturias before the British cinemagoing public in October, 1934, even if their story was woefully inadequate.

Yet if the newsreel coverage of Spain during this period was sufficiently scant as to preclude an investigation to find out whether they were holding to a particular "line" on Spanish affairs, at least it is possible to determine, from their other European coverage, what events took the newsreel interest generally. From this one can ascertain what "messages" they wished to posit at the time. Most of all such a survey, however brief, is essential in order to be able to evaluate whether, by the advent of the Civil War, there were in evidence any preordained ideas that could be superimposed upon the film reports that were to emanate from the Civil War.

At the outset of the 1930s the British newsreels became inextricably bound up with political moves on the European front towards disarmament. At its simplest this manifested itself with such clips as the following from a British Movietone story, released on September 18, 1930, in a report entitled "Foreign Secretary at Geneva: Mr. Henderson talks to you from the Home of the League of Nations". Henderson appears and says, in part:

Friends, here we are at Geneva once again dealing with the great question of world peace and doing everything humanly possible to prevent future war.¹⁵

15. British Movietone News Issue No.67, 18/9/30. "Foreign Secretary at Geneva".

At the time Henderson was part of a preparatory commission, set up by the League, to pave the way for a fully-fledged commission on disarmament. Such an extract could only have been seen as reflecting his personal optimism at the outcome of the preparations, but within a short time such hopes and aspirations for the prospect of world peace became commonplace on the newsreel screen. Another Movietone story for July 13, 1931, was called "If the Nations of the World Could See and Speak to Each Other There Would Be No More War".¹⁶ It contained speeches made by the three party leaders from the stage of the Albert Hall in which they all urged world disarmament. Ramsay MacDonald spoke of creating "that state of disarmament which it is our conviction is the essential ingredient of peace" and of getting "the Nations of the World to join in and reduce this enormous, disgraceful burden of armaments". Stanley Baldwin spoke of "the Will to Peace" existing "throughout Europe among the statesmen" and of his conviction that "the cause of Peace is going to be aided by international disarmament". Lloyd George stated: "You will never disarm, you will never effect real disarmament until you renounce war, not merely on a scroll, but in the hearts of men".

Such hopes for world peace received a severe international setback when on September 18, 1931, the Japanese invaded Manchuria. Yet even with regard to this action

16. BMN Issue No.110, 13/7/31. "If the Nations of the World Could See and Speak to Each Other There Would Be No More War".

A.J.P. Taylor has observed:

Rightly or wrongly, the British Government attached more importance to the restoration of peace than to a display of moral rectitude.¹⁷

Within a short time the League achieved its Disarmament Conference and Movietone could once again spotlight Arthur Henderson speaking from Geneva. He was no longer foreign secretary but he was president of the conference and in that capacity he buoyantly declared:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I greet you from the city of Geneva, where I have had the honour of opening the first World Conference on International Disarmament. I am not unmindful of the many difficulties and pitfalls in our path, but the difficulties and the pitfalls must be faced with courage.¹⁸

But the problems that were soon to confront the hopes of both politicians and newsreels alike over disarmament began to place a great strain upon their respective desires for peace. The international situation got steadily worse after Hitler came to power in Germany in January, 1933, and it was exacerbated by his determination to rearm in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, withdrawing as he finally did in October of the same year from the Disarmament Conference.

By 1935 the newsreels were beginning to change their outlook in order to reflect the growing concern over political events. This showed itself at its best in a Movietone release

17. A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, Harmondsworth 1964, (1st Edn., London 1961), p.91.

18. BMN Issue No.139, 4/2/32. "Arthur Henderson presides in Geneva".

with the title "Is there to be an Armaments Race?".¹⁹ The story ran:

"IS THERE TO BE AN
ARMAMENTS RACE?" S/Id
on building

Building

Wipe to ship "Japan"
S/Id

Cannon shot off ship

Line of sailors

Wipe to planes in formation

"Germany" S/Id

Closer shot

Formation

Wipe to soldiers in line
in Red Square "Russia"
S/Id

soldiers and bayonets

Wipe to lines of planes
"Italy"

Wipe to cannon fired in
field

kneeling soldiers firing

Tank over ledge

Tank into wall

Wipe to battleship

"England" S/Id

Front of ship firing

rows of soldiers marching

row of planes, prop-
ellers turning

Ship firing

COMMENTARY

At the new home of the League of Nations in Geneva, the chief news is a nation's army. It is announced that Britain will spend more on armaments; why? Because the whole world is arming. Japan demands parity on the sea with Britain and the United States: she wishes to complement her great military strength by greater sea power.

Germany is building aeroplanes, commercial craft, but perhaps convertible: her right to rearm had been tacitly recognised.

With mightily masses of manpower, Soviet Russia parades a Red Army, second to none in her history. Aeroplanes for Italy, thousands of them, lined up in spectacular array. Mussolini has fostered an airforce which challenges comparison with the finest in the world.

France maintains her military strength, trains artillery, and mechanises her powerful army.

France demands security and will not disarm.

And Britain, long content with dominance on the sea, contemplates bigger estimates for all three services.

For the army, still the small professional body of traditions, successors to the old contingents. The royal airforce becoming more and more important to Imperial defence and for the navy, also an increase.

19. BMN Issue No.300, 7/3/35. "Is there to be an Armaments Race?".

Ship "United States" S/Id planes on ship	Already the United States have faced the same problem but have taken the course which seems now to lie before Britain, an increase in armaments to preserve some defensive ratio with the offensive power of other nations.
plane formation	
Sunset, ship with planes	

This story was released three days after the "Statement Relating to Defence" had been issued as a White Paper.

A.J.P. Taylor is quite categorical that the latter document "announced that the British Government had ceased to rely on collective security and were now going to rely on the older security of armed force."²⁰ Movietone's newsreel report was equally as unequivocal in its vindication of the British Government's standpoint with regard to rearmament. The opening lines to the commentary suggest that Britain was compelled to prepare herself militarily because the other nations of the world were now doing so. The use of the terms "Imperial defence" and "defensive ratio" lays strong emphasis, however, on the point that Britain should not be seen as a potential aggressor. And the review which scans the rearmament by the world powers leads quite logically, although somewhat apologetically into a final rejoinder stating Britain's case.

The spirit of peace exists by implication, although throughout the story the visual accompaniment is decidedly of an aggressive character, not resting simply within the realms of military preparedness, but pointing out most of

20. A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, p.376.

all armaments in action. The reasons for this could well have been threefold. First of all the shots of military action would contrast vividly with the commentary's insistence that Britain was rearming for the purposes of maintaining the peace by acting as a deterrent. The final shot of a ship and planes against a tranquil sunset would appear to reinforce such a message. Secondly, it could be argued that by showing military action the newsreel was attempting to rekindle a hatred of war in the cinema audience, and thereby enhance the message that Britain should go to any lengths to prevent future conflict. It would not have been necessary to instil a hatred of war in the audience for many of them must surely have endured the Great War. Finally it should not be forgotten that the newsreel might well have been using lots of action simply to attract the audience's attention, and so they drew upon the same visual iconography of war that had always met with great success in every realm of the film industry. Certainly by the time of the Abyssinian War the two latter elements were very much in evidence.

British Paramount News opened their coverage of the Abyssinian War with a story released on October 7, 1935,²¹ within a matter of days of the fighting. They were able to do so only because the first-hand footage shot by their own cameramen is nondescript film of Italians embarking from the port of Naples and Abyssinian troops on manoeuvres. There is battle footage in this release which purports to be of Italians and Abyssinians fighting each other on the field

21. BP Issue No.481, 7/10/35. "War. Italians invade Abyssinia".

of combat. Yet in fact this material comprised "Special trick war material from America", as their library entries readily admit.

Paramount wished to emphasise the destructive capacity of modern warfare and obviously felt they did not have enough newsreel material from Abyssinia by that point in time to do so. Ironically the newsreel way to point out to an audience the dangers and horrors of war was to show as much dramatic and warlike footage as they could lay their hands upon, a method which belied their occasional worries about offending the public's susceptibilities over the exhibition of such film. The trick material in question included:

1. General top view of soldiers advancing over No-Mans Land. (Film that looks suspiciously as though it has been culled from a feature film.)
2. Big close up of tank into camera, over barbed wire, and shell exploding at side of tank.
3. Air view of planes bombing, smoke coming from ground.
4. Long view of house blown to pieces.
5. Close up of English and German planes colliding in mid air.
6. Front view of soldiers advancing; shell explodes in their midst; some get killed.
7. Close up of explosion covering the whole of the screen.
8. Big general view of soldiers advancing; firing of machine gun from behind ruins; smoke and aeroplane flying close to ground; machine gunning soldiers.
9. Close up map of Abyssinia.

There are several other interesting features about this story. Most of all it is noticeable that the newsreel begins by generating an obvious sense of distance. After an opening credit that states quite simply "War", vividly superimposed over the flames from an explosion, the camera cuts to establishing shots of Mussolini and Rome. A syren blows, then people are seen in the streets of Rome excitedly reading newspapers with headlines of war, to be followed in turn by a view of church bells ringing. The next montage takes the audience to the port of Naples where troops embark, waving and carrying a banner of Mussolini. Crown Prince Humbert and a band of officers bid them farewell.

Then the story cuts to Addis Ababa where after another establishing shot of the Emperor there follows an unusual array of film which consists of warriors dancing in the streets in a frenzied manner, only to fall to the ground in a trance, whereupon they put their swords to their own throats in acts of mock suicide. The commentator explains that it depicts a tribal custom whereby they pledge to offer up their lives for the Emperor. But when it is followed a few feet later by shots of uniformed Abyssinian troops marching on rough terrain without any boots upon their feet, there can be little doubt that the cameraman must have been treating the audience to a sight rarely seen, and indeed not expected, of a traditional European army.

The point is brought home in the succeeding shots which present a general view of row upon row of modern Italian aeroplanes. After showing Count Ciano, then Bruno

and Vittorio Mussolini, the film breaks into the montage of trick war material.

So far the review has traversed the ground from an exultant Rome, to an alien Addis Ababa and a make-believe battlefield, only to come to rest finally in London where Ramsay MacDonald, then the Lord President, proceeds to deliver the following speech to the newsreel camera:

It is war and war is horrible and it is dangerous as well. But I can assure you all that the action this nation has taken, has been to the good. Every effort will be made to stop it.

The contrast between a warlike Italy, a wartorn Abyssinia, and a peacefully inspired MacDonald is admirably and succinctly drawn by means of simple editing and an effective juxtaposition of what the newsreel considers to be the issues at stake.

Somewhat similar motives appear to have been at the heart of the newsreel coverage of Spain during the first half of 1936. The image of Spain as presented by the newsreels immediately before the advent of the Civil War is best typified by three British Paramount stories. From these one gets the distinct impression that Spain was for the most part considered to be an exotic, faraway place with manners and customs very different to those in Britain, and that it was of little more than passing interest, other than as a potential holiday resort.

For instance their issue for April 30²² has a story in which the opening titles go on to recount that "Seville

22. BP Issue No. 540, 30/4/36. "Fete Spanish President".

welcomes nation's new head" as "Senor Barrio accompanies new Spanish President to bullfight". The film shows Azana and Martinez Barrio, the speaker of the Cortes. But Paramount seem to have been a bit premature and shown great foresight in proclaiming on April 30 that Azana was the new Spanish president, for he was not formally elected until May 10. Certainly it was fair to say that "when special elections for presidential candidates were held on April 26, there was massive middle-class abstention" as a result of which "the choice of the leftist candidate, Azana, seemed inevitable, for the centre and right were demoralised and even more disunited than before".²³ But for once the news gathering service of a major newsreel organisation was seen to have anticipated correctly.

It soon becomes obvious, however, that this story concentrates its attention upon shots which perpetuate the popular image of Spain as a place of bullfights and matadors. Out of the sixteen shots that make up the story, only four isolate the politicians involved and the rest cover a range of sequences which comprise shots of the decorations adorning the parade, people dressed in national costume on horseback, matadors and the bullfight itself. The off-stage commentator's voice fleetingly mentions the politicians and then goes on to describe the bullfight to the accompaniment of Spanish music and the roar of the crowd.

23. Payne, The Spanish Revolution, p.193.

Paramount's issue for June 15²⁴ concerned itself even less with politics containing as it did a story entitled "Bees rout rheumatics". After a caption jovially announcing "Five stings and you're cured", it goes on to recount that a professor in Madrid was demonstrating before the cameras his new treatment for rheumatics. This amounted to a series of stings on the afflicted parts of the patient's anatomy, a treatment which reportedly "claims amazing results". Such an item must have helped to engender the feeling that Spain was somewhat far removed from what might ordinarily be expected to go on in Great Britain and that it was largely remote from the British way of life, though no doubt one or two people set off in search of the nearest bee hive.

Politics in Spain during the first six months of 1936 were not entirely absent from the British newsreel screen. On February 16, 1936, Spain went to the polls and the Popular Front, a group comprising the parties of the Left, was returned with the largest number of votes cast in their favour and the greatest number of seats in the Cortes. But from the moment of the election a wave of violence overtook the country, resulting in riots and murder. Paramount reported the result of the election but in a manner that emphasised the attendant violence. For their story on February 20. noted that "Riots follow election which gave

24. BP Issue No.553, 15/6/36. "Bees rout rheumatics".

the parties of the Left a clear majority".²⁵ The story contained footage of people outside polling booths, people voting, the elected government on a balcony acknowledging the cheers of their supporters. But the final shots show evidence of skirmishes between crowds and the police, with civilians running before mounted policemen and policemen on foot flailing members of the public with truncheons. The report mentioned there were "Three killed and scores injured" in the skirmish which was being shown. To this extent the newsreels suddenly found themselves in line with the newspapers in this country for "throughout the entire six months of the year the British press was regularly reporting details of the class clashes, which were an almost daily occurrence".²⁶

But on the whole the image of Spain as presented by the newsreels before the advent of the Civil War was only a rudimentary image. It has been suggested that "in the years preceding the Civil War, British opinion was being wooed for the cause of Left and Right in Spain", over such matters as the Asturias revolt, and "This conditioning paved the way for the more ready acceptance of the partisan propaganda of the years 1936-1939".²⁷ Be that as it may, the newsreels had played little part either in the wooing or the conditioning. They had simply sketched in some very rough outlines of the story on Spain. However the Civil War was to change all that.

25. BP Issue No.520, 20/2/36. "Spain holds election".

26. Watkins, Britain Divided, p.27.

27. Ibid., p.26.

Chapter 6

The Advent of the War

The Spanish Civil War broke out on July 17, 1936, with the rising of the garrison at Melilla in Spanish Morocco. By the evening of that day the insurrection under Colonel Segui was complete and the city was under martial law. On the same day there were risings at Tetuan, under Colonel Saenz de Buruaga, and Ceuta, under Colonel Yague. By the early morning of July 18 the insurrection had spread to the mainland of Spain with General Queipo de Llano leading the rebellious troops in Seville, while fighting also took place at Cadiz, Jerez, Algeciras, La Linea, Cordoba, Granada, Huelva and Malaga. The next day, July 19, saw the arrival of Moorish troops from the Army of Africa landing at Cadiz and in the North of Spain the rebels achieved victories at Pamplona, Burgos, Saragossa and Valladolid.

The first week of the War had profound repercussions upon both sides in the fighting. On July 18 the Prime Minister, Casares Quiroga, resigned his office whereupon President Azana invited Martinez Barrio to form a government. But the attempts of Martinez Barrio and General Miaja, his new Minister of War, to treat with the rebels came to nothing and during the evening of that same day Azana and Martinez Barrio called together the Socialist leaders Largo Caballero and Prieto for discussions. A new Government was formed under Giral. The morning of July 19 saw a decision to

distribute arms to the people. By July 20 risings in Madrid and Barcelona had been subdued. Four days later the Nationalists, for their part, had established a junta at Burgos under the presidency of General Cabanellas and comprising those leaders of the rebellion on the mainland. They included Generals Mola, Saliquet, Ponte and Davila. In fact the real power lay with the actual Nationalist commanders in the field where General Mola was in charge of the Nationalist territories in the North of Spain, from El Ferrol to Saragossa and from the Pyrenees to Avila, in Nationalist Andalusia where General Queipo de Llano held sway, and in Morocco and the Canary Islands where General Franco was in command.

The Gaumont British Newsreel managed to get its first coverage of the hostilities in Spain on to the cinema screen in this country in a story released in its issue for July 27.¹ The report began with the fighting on the mainland and chose to ignore the initial uprisings in Morocco. Gaumont's first pictures of the fighting immediately took pride of place in the overall issue and occupied the opening slot in a collection of five items. The story took up 116 feet of film out of a total of 717 feet devoted to this particular newsreel.

The visual emphasis of the story concentrated on the dramatic nature of the conflict, with shots of the destruction

1. GB Issue No.269, 27/7/36. "Spanish Revolution".

and devastation resulting from the onslaught of the hostilities. The commentary, written by E.V.H. (Ted) Emmett, is interesting for several reasons. The main contrast he wishes to draw is revealed when he states that "Gaumont British News tells a graphic story of bloodshed and violence in the one-time lazy south." Ted Emmett's message is one of peaceful tranquillity torn asunder by the ravages of war and it is melodramatically reinforced by such statements as "The land of smiling tomorrow is grim today" and "Through the streets of Madrid naked murder is stalking, the ever-present spectre."

Emmett invites the audience to identify with the situation by describing Seville, Saragossa and San Sebastian as "places known so well to tourists in times of peace" (though it is debatable how well known they were at that point in time to what was a predominantly working class cinema audience), and then confronts them with "pictures which unfold the cataclysm that has taken toll already of 20,000 lives." Lest the audience should fail to grasp "the tragedy of civil war", Emmett employs an array of visual symbols sufficiently commonplace to evoke a response when he reveals that "churches and cathedrals burn, public and private buildings are sacked and pillaged as by the army of an invader." But then he forcibly distances this war "in a country divided against itself" by stressing the particular nature of civil war when he shows that "Even young girls and women are armed with rifles and revolver" and as he concludes "Death walks in sunny Spain."

In the light of subsequent newsreel depiction of the protagonists in this war it is useful to note at this point the terminology describing the warring parties as revealed in the comment: "In the rising of the Fascists against the Government brother raises his rifle against brother." The word "Fascists" simply does not accurately describe the plethora of parties, both religious and political, which supported the Insurgent forces at this time and indeed it was to be dropped in later newsreels.

Although this report was the first release by Gaumont British News since the onset of Civil War in Spain, several points already emerge in evaluating such archive film as a historical source. For example, it is noticeable that nowhere in this piece does the newsreel company go any way towards explaining the causes of the fighting. Of course it should be added that the film appeared on the cinema screen within ten days of the outbreak of hostilities. Yet there is still no attempt to evaluate at all the political situation in Spain that might have been seen to have caused the military rebellion. In fact the report does not even elaborate upon who was in rebellion. What it does do, however, is to assess the destructive nature of civil war in human terms and relate this to a British audience by pointing out the disruptive effects on the Spanish people at a personal level. The British audience, for its part, is invited to sympathise with the plight of the Spaniards.

It was the second Gaumont report on Spain that

brought Britain more forcefully into the fray.² For this story began by highlighting the beginning of a stream of refugees from Spain to such havens of safety as Marseilles and Gibraltar. Once again it was placed in a prominent position in the release, this time as the concluding item in a run of six stories and it comprised some 156 feet of film, only being beaten for length by a story on George Bernard Shaw reaching the age of eighty.

Here Emmett's commentary notes that "English and Americans are numbered among those who have escaped with their lives and belongings" and in a truly patriotic tone adds that they have arrived at the makeshift stopover in Gibraltar "thankful once again for the reassuring sight of a British bluejacket." He elaborates further on this theme by stating: "Overland, refugees pour into Gibraltar, making a temporary camp by the wayside under the benevolent eye of the Rock of Gibraltar's British police." Evidently Emmett wished Britain to be seen by the cinemagoing public in this country as a bastion of stability and order. But he does not stop there and he goes on to describe how Britain is playing a role, albeit a small one, as the arbiter of peace and justice. For he describes an incident in which "Submarines loyal to the Spanish Government have occupied the straits of Gibraltar. The submarine C3 has been sunk by aerial bombing, but wild shooting between the combatants brought a stern reply from the British warships." The

2. GB Issue No.270, 30/7/36. "Spanish Revolution. Refugees depart on British ships".

Spanish Government had indeed assembled a fleet in the Gibraltar waters which by July 19 consisted also of the battleship Jaime Primo, dispatched from Vigo, and the Libertad and the Cervantes, dispatched from El Ferrol. Their express aim was to prevent General Franco transporting the Army of Africa across the straits. In fact an earlier draft of Emmett's script to the one eventually used for this release acknowledged the plan by noting that the Spanish submarines were "patrolling to hold up the passage of rebel troops from Morocco." But this latter sentence was finally deleted in the spoken commentary and Emmett chose instead to make great play out of the intervention of the British warships.³ Whether this excision was made simply as a result of the pressures of time and space cannot be ascertained but as a result no reference is made by Gaumont to the exodus of the Army of Africa from Morocco to Spain.

The rest of Gaumont's second report on Spain charted the advances of the first campaigns of the War by showing scenes from the fighting around Guadalajara and in the Guadarrama mountains. On July 19, Mola had sent Colonel Garcia Escamez to relieve Guadalajara but he only reached a point some twenty miles from the city before it had fallen to Republican forces sent from Madrid. After some military engagements Garcia Escamez withdrew to take up a

3. Such amendments are evident from the typewritten script which accompanies this particular story in the newsreel archive.

position in the Somosierra Pass of the Guadarrama Mountains. On July 21 another Nationalist force under Colonel Serrador also set out for the Guadarrama and for the Alta de Leon Pass. The subsequent engagements for both these passes proved to be the first set battles of the War and Gaumont included coverage from the Guadarrama Mountains and the Somosierra Pass in particular, not only in this second report, but also in its third,⁴ fourth,⁵ and fifth⁶ editions. Throughout all these issues it is the internal nature and strife of the Civil War that is stressed. Emmett's commentary for the second report points this out by concluding finally: "Women and young girls are among those who have shared with their menfolk the privilege of shedding their blood. This is the price of a new Spain." The prospect of "the rebel army approaching Madrid from the North, with women in its ranks" could only have appeared alien to the British audience and must have served to give distance to the events that were going on in Spain. Similarly in the fifth report, Emmett shows "men and women, boys and girls, going into action in the battle of Somosierra, the battle for the key to Madrid." So it was that the Spanish Civil War was initially seen to be far removed from the British experience.

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4. GB Issue No.271, 3/8/36. "Civil War in Spain".
 5. GB Issue No.272, 6/8/36. "Spanish Civil War Fourth Edition".
 6. GB Issue No.273, 10/8/36. "Spanish Civil War Fifth Edition".

The composition and preoccupations of these opening Gaumont stories were to a great extent matched by similar coverage in their British Paramount counterparts, the first one of which did not reach the cinemas until August 6. Although the location for BP issue 568⁷ is actually Barcelona much the same story is told. Visually the attention is focussed upon general shots of blazing buildings and furniture burning in the streets. In fact much of the material showing destruction in the city as well as many of the shots purporting to reveal "Graphic pictures of fighting" were culled from the British Paramount stock-shot library, as their library entries readily admit. They were certainly not shots taken at the time of the uprising in Barcelona. It is not surprising that Paramount failed to get first-hand footage of the insurrection in Barcelona for it began as early as July 19, when the newsreel companies could hardly have been prepared, and was for the most part quelled by the evening of July 20. They did, however, arrive in time to secure film of civilians being issued with rifles, an act which Luis Companys, the President of Catalonia, had at first refused to sanction until the CNT, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Trades Union, had taken matters very much into their own hands by raiding arms depots. Paramount also secured film of foreign warships in Barcelona harbour. There is a United States warship with American nationals on board and in the process of being ferried from

7. BP Issue No.568, 6/8/36. "Spain. Latest War Pictures".

the shore with their belongings. Similarly they obtained film for the end of the story of "Insurgent forces at Somosierra". But a long intervening passage, a montage of war scenes including howitzers firing and cavalry charging, is faked from material taken earlier than the events they are meant to depict. It is used to emphasise the carnage of war along with shots of dead horses and wounded soldiers.

If Paramount were a little slow off the mark in obtaining first hand film material for their opening coverage of the War, they more than made up for the mistake in their two subsequent issues. The release for August 10⁸ centred upon Toledo where the Nationalist forces under Colonel Moscardo, after an initially successful uprising, were driven back into the fortress of the Alcazar by the militias which had descended upon the town from Madrid. One week later on August 17, in issue 571,⁹ Paramount went even further afield securing film from many locations. The story contained shots of Government warships shelling the Nationalist stronghold of Algeciras, which had been in revolt since July 18 and which had been successfully augmented by units of Moors from the Army of Africa, before the Republican fleet had put into effect its blockade of the sea route. Paramount would appear to have been mistaken, however, in

8. BP Issue No.569, 10/8/36. "Spanish War still raging".

9. BP Issue No.571, 17/8/36. "Madrid holds out".

calling the Government cruiser the Jaime Primo, since the latter ship was in fact a battleship and by August 9, it was on its way to Ibiza as part of an expeditionary force. Gaumont covered the same incident and simply referred to Algeciras being "shelled by Spanish warships."¹⁰ The rest of Paramount's story of August 17 included scenes of General Mola at the headquarters of the Nationalist junta in Burgos. Unlike Gaumont, Paramount had at least singled out some of the leading personalities in the War so far, for this story went on to spotlight Largo Caballero in Madrid. But like Gaumont, Paramount succumbed at this stage to a simplistic reference to "the Fascist headquarters". The report concluded with film of incidents at Villa Franca, Tolosa, Gainza, Madrid and, once again, Toledo.

Gibraltar had appeared fleetingly at the beginning of this report with a general view of the Rock and a long view with pan of yachts and warships in the harbour. It was to appear more extensively in the subsequent issue,¹¹ with a story on refugees having their papers vetted by a British "bobby" at the gate of a refugee camp, while an armed British soldier in a kilt stands guard nearby. The camera traverses a row of tents where the refugees make their homes and takes in some posed shots of Sir Charles Harrington, the Governor of Gibraltar, as he inspects the facilities. Soup is being

10. GB Issue No.277, 24/8/36. "Spanish Civil War Seventh Edition".

11. BP Issue No.572, 20/8/36. "Rebel attacks coverage".

served to hungry internees and their children. Once more Britain was seen to be the saviour of the situation and, not for the first time, the Rock of Gibraltar took on a symbolic significance. This story then went on to chart the advances in the War itself with film of the Nationalist troops rejoicing after the capture of Tolosa, the former Basque capital, which had been effected on August 11 under the command of Colonel Latorre.

What is most interesting about Paramount's opening coverage of the Spanish Civil War is their willingness to use stories of more than just general interest. It was Paramount who drew attention in issue 573¹² to the German battleships which had anchored off Alicante, a Republican stronghold, "as a warning to Spain that there must be no further bloodshed of German Nazis in Spain." On the same day of release Gaumont's issue 277¹³ chose instead to highlight the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption in Seville. Franco and Queipo de Llano were present at the ceremony which had been held on August 15 and during which they replaced the flag of the Republic with the Monarchist flag. Gaumont covered the event and "a religious procession through the streets followed." Emmett pointed out: "This is the first demonstration of this character that has taken place in Seville for many years".

12. BP Issue No.573, 24/8/36. "Spanish War Deadlock".

13. GB Issue No.277.

The natural inference to be drawn from his remark was that the Republic was irreligious and had thereby prevented any such ceremonies from taking place in previous years. Emmett then underlined his remark by stressing the unruly nature of the Republic. To do this he showed film which spotlighted the heavy damage that had been done to the British Consulate in Algeciras by Government forces.

Paramount were also quick in acknowledging that the Insurgent forces contained a large contingent of Moorish troops. This they did in a story entitled "Moors aid Rebels"¹⁴ which was released on August 31 with film of General Cabanellas reviewing a unit of the Army of Africa at Burgos. Gaumont did the same on September 3¹⁵ with similar film backed up by a statement to the effect that "General Cabanellas, head of the Provisional Government, is confident of victory as fresh contingents of Moors from across the water march towards Madrid." Gaumont may have been slower than Paramount in making use of a story but they were certainly ahead of them in injecting comment as distinct from news into their coverage.

The extent of outside interest in Spain's affairs was illustrated by Paramount when on September 7¹⁶ their newsreel contained a piece on the War and a short item on the arrival

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- 14. BP Issue No.575, 31/8/36. "Moors aid Rebels".
 - 15. GB Issue No.280, 3/9/36. "Rebels take outpost of hilltop near Burgos".
 - 16. BP Issue No.577, 7/9/36. "Rebels take Irun".

in Madrid of the Soviet Union's first Ambassador to Spain, Marcel Rosenberg. There had been plans for a formal exchange of Ambassadors since February of that year but it did not actually happen until August 27. It is also evident from the same newsreel company's coverage in these first months of the War that at least one newsreel considered that the War in Spain would be a short-lived affair. Their very first report had already stated that "the Government and Rebel forces prepare for decisive battle",¹⁷ their second report expressed surprise at the "Spanish War still raging",¹⁸ the third story noted that "Madrid holds out" but also that the "Spanish Civil War nears climax",¹⁹ and once more, when the fighting was plainly nowhere nearer to a standstill, their fifth report narrated the events surrounding "The Spanish Civil War deadlock" but wondered why "Victory still eludes both armies".²⁰

Despite the fact that the War was continually believed to be close to an end neither Paramount nor Gaumont spared any expense or manpower in their coverage of the events. Of course next to the Abyssinian War the hostilities in Spain were the first of any magnitude in which they were able to put to use the full might of sound recording on film. Certainly the Spanish Civil War was the first European war

17. BP Issue No.568.

18. BP Issue No.569.

19. BP Issue No.571.

20. BP Issue No.573.

since the arrival of sound film which might go some way towards explaining the volume of film expended. For in the opening two months of the War the amount of film shot by these two companies alone was immense. Gaumont's cameras ranged from Madrid, to Guadalajara, to the mountains of the Guadarrama, then to Gibraltar, Seville, Saragossa, San Sebastian, Burgos, Algeciras, Azaila, Irun and Huelva. That was in twelve issues and up to September 14. Paramount's cameramen duplicated many of the same towns and cities, sending back stories from as far afield as Barcelona, Madrid, Gibraltar, Algeciras, Burgos, Villa Franca, Tolosa, Gainza, Toledo, San Sebastian, Alicante, Pina and Irun, which were used in seven issues up to September 7. Both companies had placed cameramen with the Republican forces as well as the Nationalist troops and film had been received from the main campaigns of action, in the Sierras and Aragon in July, and in August, northwards from Seville with Franco and the Army of Africa, and with Mola and the Army of the North against San Sebastian and Irun.

It is noticeable though that the way these two newsreel companies used their respective material in compiling their reports was very different. There is little comment of a political nature from the Paramount commentators, simply a narrative of events **which**, as befitted a company dedicated to a policy of complete anonymity for its commentators, sticks to a formula of descriptive reportage. This was in complete contrast to Gaumont's commentator, Ted Emmett, whose opinionated, florid and literary style was full of

subjective responses to the situation in Spain. For all Paramount's commendable intentions in attempting to avoid comment and controversy in their reporting of the news, it is ironically Emmett's unashamed efforts to formulate opinions and mould public response that provide the better insight into the newsreels' messages and intentions. For there is evidence to suggest that even at this comparatively early stage the newsreels were beginning to realise their potential as a tool of propaganda and as a formative element in the creation of public opinion on Spain. Gaumont British News were well equipped to lay down their inherent ideas on a foreign event such as the Spanish Civil War since their editing machinery was very much in the hands of the one man, Emmett. Of course Emmett was by no means in complete command at Gaumont and anything he might wish to say would undoubtedly have passed before the eyes of the producer-in-chief at the very least. But for all that Emmett's control was such that not only did he write and read the commentaries on all stories but he also helped to edit the film coming in from their cameramen. This helped to ensure a continuity of storyline throughout the whole of any one particular issue, as well as from one individual story to the next. Such continuity was noticeably lacking in the work put out by all Gaumont's British rivals. Perhaps the only competitor in this country to such an integrated technique was "The March of Time" which was a monthly release and so could allocate more time and effort to its compilation. It will be seen that Emmett's conception of the impact a release

might make was exceptionally acute, not only by virtue of its overall appearance, but also with regard to the respective positions that each story might occupy relative to one another. The results he achieved were highly refined and effective.

The first newsreel release on Spain from Gaumont which was seen to be consciously propagandistic in tone was issue no.274.²¹ It was shown on August 13 and the particular story was entitled "The Blonde Amazon". In it a British schoolteacher by the name of Phylis Gwatkin Williams, who had happened to be in Spain at the outbreak of the War, spoke of her experiences to the Gaumont British News.

This story is interesting because it reveals two features; one, a bias in news reporting in favour of the rebel, Insurgent forces and, two, an anti-war message. The first point was appreciated even at the time of the newsreel's release. The October edition of World Film News, for example, had a headline boldly proclaiming "Newsreels show political bias. Editing of Spanish Civil War scenes discloses partisan views." In an editorial which followed Brian Crosthwaite went on to say the following:

The Gaumont British newsreel in its issue of August 13 has, I think, made a new and very dangerous departure from the rule of impartiality, which we are led to believe they have imposed on themselves, in its presentation of a witness of the Spanish rebellion. The lady interviewed, described for us as 'The Blonde Amazon', was looked after by Government troops and recounts the stories

21. GB Issue No.274, 13/8/36. "The Blonde Amazon".

with which they regaled her---of burning four fascists in a car, executing seventy officers with a machine gun, and so on. She herself had seen a church burned down in front of her hotel; and she tells how the women-fighters were the worst of all.

Now we have no right to doubt this particular lady's word; but it must be pointed out that although she was selected from some hundreds of refugees from Spain, many of whom have an entirely different story to tell, she was not a witness at first hand of the most important part of her story and had apparently no knowledge of Spain to give any importance to her account.

The choosing of an unreliable but sensational witness is deplorable but perhaps understandable. The Gaumont British Newsreel editor has however gone to considerable pains to give verisimilitude to her story by cutting in, at the appropriate and telling moments, shots of a car burning, a church burning, fierce-looking civilians their fists raised in salute, women fighting and the noise of machine guns, which in conjunction with the interview has become straight anti-Government atrocity propaganda. This method of cutting to stock shots is the normal method of giving reality to the fiction film; but when it is used to give reality to what is only a witness's statement in a newsreel film which we are in the habit of accepting as objective it becomes deadly dangerous.²²

Crosthwaite's analysis of the visual component to this story is highly accurate. After the opening credits announcing the "Exclusive G.B. News interview with mystery woman of the Spanish Revolution", the first shot is a posed view of Miss Williams standing in the midst of a band of armed Spaniards. She is holding a gun in one hand and a bayonet in the other. Since she is not stated to have participated in any action, nor is it explained where she

22. Brian Crosthwaite, "Newsreel show political bias", World Film News, Vol.1, No.7, October 1936, p.41.

was based in Spain, one can only assume that a cameraman set up the opening shot for effect. Nor can it be the case that this shot was taken from a photograph, for after a momentary stillness, it breaks into animation. It is possible this opening shot was faked when she had returned to Britain but it was rare indeed for such extremes of deception in the newsreels by 1936. What is most likely is that Gaumont made a concerted effort to follow up this one person's movements when she had returned to this country. For then the camera cuts to Miss Williams coming down her garden path and sitting down on a garden seat. She proceeds to narrate the course of events as described by Crosthwaite in his review. Her narrative is entirely personal in character and highly impressionistic.

At the same time her story is enhanced by a series of visuals, drawn from the Gaumont stock-shot library, that complement the gist of her narration. It begins with a shot of Republican troops giving the Republican salute then advancing through the street towards the camera and waving their arms and bayonets in the air. It is noticeable that they advance at random and the general impression is one of confusion. Even in the ensuing shots of uniformed troops climbing onto trucks they do so haphazardly and without any obvious discipline being exerted. Most of the armed men, however, appear in civilian garb generally dressed in working men's overalls. There are numerous shots of streets crowded by such armed men.

These are followed by views of burning buildings, a close-up of some girls practising the actions of loading a rifle, then a long shot of a blazing church, a close-up of the same leading into a pan across to people cheering and once again giving the Republican salute. This sequence ends with a view of the church. The final montage is of civilians firing rifles, highlighting a girl doing the same, and a shot of people advancing in a crouched manner through a boulevard and taking cover behind trees on the sidewalk. The last shot is a close up of Miss Williams as she proclaims: "If people could realise how terrible war is, they'd do everything they can to prevent it."

It is true to say that on the whole the civilians are "fierce-looking" in character. Most of them appear to be armed and in one shot they are evidently seen to be leading another civilian in captivity, with his arms raised and under rifle sight, to what can only be conjectured to be a fifth columnist's fate. The uniformed troops who do appear are indeed made out to be ill disciplined and contrast strongly with the presentation in other stories of the Nationalist forces. To take but one example, British Paramount issue 571²³ has shots of General Mola inspecting a contingent of his army at Burgos where it is obvious that his regulars form ranks in an orderly and military fashion. They appear well disciplined and smartly dressed as befits a professional army. But then it should not be

23. BP Issue No.571.

forgotten that, after all, the Nationalist forces were made up of the bulk of Spain's standing, professional army as it existed before the onset of the War. And if the presentation of the Republican soldiers in the Blonde Amazon story is such that it becomes difficult to distinguish between civilians and army, then again it only reflects the truth. For at the outset of the Civil War the Republican army was indeed a ragbag.

However the crowds in this story are shown to be anarchistic by nature with no mention whatsoever of the constructive side to the Republic's attempts to mould a social revolution. The crowds appear to be gloating over and rejoicing in the burning of a church. In fact the anti-religious character of the Republic became a recurrent image, in direct contrast to the presentation of the Nationalists as deeply religious people, perhaps best shown in Gaumont's story on the Feast of the Assumption at Seville.²⁴ Paramount issue 571²⁵ takes the theme even further by showing "Red Government fighters ranging them themselves before the Statue of Christ and His Angels in Madrid" and proceeding to fire at and ultimately desecrate the broken remains. This action takes place to the accompaniment of a commentator stating: "You are now about to witness an event that shocked the world." There can be no doubt that the Republican side committed many acts of

24. GB Issue No.277.

25. BP Issue No.571.

desecration and infamy, indeed many atrocities. But what is lacking in both these accounts, most of all, is a sense of balance. It will be seen that when the newsreels had evidence of Nationalist atrocities, such as the massacre at Badajoz, they failed to use it.

It is emphasised very forcibly that women were part and parcel of the Republican forces and on one occasion Miss Williams states: "They were the worst of all". The newsreels had already noted that because of the very nature of civil war women were fighting on both sides of the warring armies in Spain. But the recurrent motif which typifies the depiction of Nationalist womanhood is best seen in Paramount issue 572²⁶ where there is a shot of triumphant Nationalist troops at Tolosa. For there is a procession led by a woman beautifully dressed in traditional Spanish garb, mantilla and all, with the Spanish Monarchist flag draped over her shoulder.

All in all, despite the fact that the Nationalist army constituted a rebel, insurgent army, it takes little effort to conclude that the imagery surrounding it is of a traditional, conservative Spain, fighting to preserve its heritage. While the duly-elected Republican Government is presented as maintaining an army bent upon destruction and upheaval. It would appear also that Crosthwaite's claim about the Blonde Amazon story amounting to little more than "straight anti-Government propaganda" is

26. BP Issue No.572.

essentially correct, although not always for the reasons he puts forward. It is not so much a case that what was shown of the Republic was wrong, it is more a matter that what was shown to the British cinema audiences consisted of no more than a one-sided presentation. They were not told the whole story by any means. Indeed there is no mention at all of what was going on in Nationalist Spain, whether for good or ill.

Crosthwaite's editorial went on from a detailed investigation of the Blonde Amazon story to make some general criticisms, arising from it, of the newsreel reporting on the Spanish Civil War. He claimed that "in recent newsreel issues about Spain the pro-Rebel bias has been too obvious to escape notice" and, more specifically, that "the Rothermere-controlled British Movietone News blatantly uses the terms 'Red' and 'Anti-Red'" to depict the warring factions. Neither Gaumont nor Paramount ever quite stooped to the level of using both such loaded and heavily biased terms, though they began their coverage badly by referring to the "Fascists" and "Reds". In presenting the Blonde Amazon to the cinema audience, the commentator had committed a one-sided over-simplification in emphasising that she was "neither Red nor Rebel". The terms "Fascist" and "Red" bore of course highly emotive connotations at the

time as indeed they did for a long time afterwards.²⁷ Within a comparatively short space of time, however, it is noticeable that both newsreel companies came to settle for the use of "Rebel", "Insurgent" or "Nationalist" on the one hand and "Government" or "Republican" on the other. In this instance it would appear that the problems involved in settling upon an appropriate terminology stemmed not so much from a desire to readily use bias but more from a basic inability to find the correct words to describe the plethora of warring parties on both sides in Spain. The American news media, for example, who were less interested in a European conflict than Britain, employed the same kind of polyglot phraseology, as was revealed in a Boake Carter radio broadcast for the Columbia Broadcasting System which ran in part:

Hello everyone, Philco Radio Times, Boake Carter speaking. Well, death, fire and pestilence and starvation, those four horsemen of war galloped over the smouldering ruins of the once beautiful Madrid today with a vengeance. And behind them, stretched the shadows of two mailed fists to set the nerves of Europe a quiver again with anxious expectancy and fighting with the most desperate bitterness yet seen in the Spanish Civil War. The armies of the Fascist

27. It is interesting to note that the British press seem also to have been guilty of a similar misrepresentation. See C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940, London 1966, p.579, where he comments; "A letter protesting against the misrepresentation of the war in the press as one fought against a Bolshevist government rather than a Liberal-democratic government was signed by novelists, historians, poets, artists of all parties and of none."

leader, General Francisco Franco flung themselves again and again against the Loyalist defenders and with equal bitter stubbornness the Loyalists refused to give way.²⁸

Carter's account was broadcast on November 18, 1936. One day later the real leader of the official Fascist Party in Spain, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, was shot by the Republicans in Alicante. It is not likely that he or his possible successors to the leadership of the Falange, Fernandez Cuesta and Serrano Suner, both of whom languished in Republican prisons, would even at that late stage have regarded Franco as the leader of the Fascist Party. Nor indeed did Franco, and within the next four months Manuel Hedilla succeeded to the leadership. In fact Franco was not even a member of the Falange.

After his comments on biased terminology Crosthwaite's editorial went on with his general comments regarding newsreel reporting. In a patronising fashion that was typical of contributors to World Film News he feared lest "Shots of unkempt militia-men contrasted with Mola's smart regulars, backed by a carefully worded and tendentious commentary, impel the innocent middle-classes to side with the better dressed." Although very badly expressed the basis of his fears was founded in reality as Paramount's

28. Boake Carter, Philco Radio Corporation. Broadcast on the Columbia Broadcasting System, 7.45 to 8.00 p.m., Wednesday, November 18, 1936. (Mimeographed copy)

film of Mola inspecting his troops at Burgos had shown.²⁹ Similarly he notes: "when the film uses its subtle technique of assertion by implication, the cumulative effect of atrocities and desecrations (nearly always by Government forces) becomes terrific." As has already been seen, stories with church burning, shooting of fifth columnists, and worse, do appear regularly at this early stage of the war. But only when aerial bombing of Republican cities came to play a large part in the war is there any hint of criticism in the British newsreels of Nationalist infamy. And even then new forces appeared in the formation of British opinion which account for the change more readily than did sheer antipathy towards Franco's pilots. During this early part of the war a newsreel could so easily invoke fear of offending public opinion at scenes of horror (always a ready stand-by), when scenes of Nationalist infamy were available. That way any such material was prevented from reaching the cinema screen. Such a course of action was invoked, for instance, when cameraman Roger Brutin secured some dramatic footage of the destruction of Badajoz. Colonel Yague took the town on August 14 and a terrible onslaught ensued during which his legionaries and Moroccans wrecked havoc. Brutin shot film of the carnage and still photographs from his material were reproduced at the time which bore witness to the events. They showed how "scarcely a house or building remained unscathed" and

29. BP Issue No. 571.

"rows of burnt, charred bodies that littered the streets." But Brutin's film material never reached the screen since the newsreel company concerned, Pathé Gazette, simply removed them.³⁰

There was one final point emerging out of the Blonde Amazon story which Brian Crosthwaite failed to take up and elaborate upon. For the anti-war message inherent in this particular story has far-reaching implications with regard to the formation of public opinion on Spain by the newsreels in question.

The very last words spoken by Miss Williams on the soundtrack are: "If people could realise how terrible war is, they'd do everything they can to prevent it." Clearly it was the intention of the newsreel production team to leave an anti-war impression in the minds of the viewers and this was made all the more evident by the fact that this was the last story, out of five items, contained in this issue. The bias reflected in the coverage of this story really takes second place to the point that the scenes of the Civil War, the scenes of women fighting, of churches burning, were all being used first and foremost to generate a hatred of war. For this was by no means the first time that the British public had been exposed to such sentiments and indeed there is every reason to believe that

30. "Scenes too gruesome for public showing", World Film News, Vol.1, No.7, October 1936, p.41.

such coverage of the Spanish Civil War was made to fit very nicely into a strong campaign that the British newsreels had conducted so far, and for some time to come, to keep Britain out of any potentially warlike situation. Furthermore this story did have a particular message for British viewers alone during the month of August 1936, for it was during that month the British Government laid down a policy in pursuit of non-intervention. The Blonde Amazon story can only be clearly understood in the context of such a policy.

The Blonde Amazon story was a particularly unusual story in its construction. Generally it was the case that Ted Emmett would act as commentator and host throughout the full length of any one Gaumont story. Certainly it was true that on occasions Emmett would cut into a story extracts and speeches from prominent politicians or personalities to back up the point he wished to make. But invariably he would introduce the extract, slip in the speech to be added, then return to his own comments for further elaboration, finally rounding the report off with his own conclusion. But here, after introducing Miss Williams to the camera, Emmett retired from the story, allowing a complete outsider, presented as a neutral observer ("neither Red nor Rebel, but a British school mistress"), to take over the commentating entirely and come to her own conclusion. Never had Emmett been seen to delegate so much responsibility, it was a new departure from the old

formula and was not to be repeated at all throughout the rest of the Spanish Civil War. Evidently at this point in time Gaumont did not wish to be seen to be interfering at all with what was presented as the "ordinary" person-in-the-street's point of view. Yet it is also interesting to note that such a radical departure in Gaumont's news presentation came at a time when by force of circumstances they were prevented from commenting upon the British political response to the Civil War in Spain.

By August 7 Britain, along with Belgium, Holland, Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia, had accepted in principle a French draft declaration of non-intervention whereby there would be no trafficking, either directly or indirectly, of war material or aircraft with either side in Spain. The great fear was, of course, that the events in Spain might lead to a general European war and "there was no politician in England prepared to argue that the country should actually involve itself on one side or another in the conflict."³¹ Throughout the rest of August there was a great deal of diplomatic activity to ensure that Germany, Italy and Russia should adhere to the idea of a non-intervention agreement and to this end Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, attempted to form a commission to supervise its working. The first meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee was set to meet at the Foreign Office in London on September 9.

31. Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, London 1964, p.219.

For some reason neither Gaumont nor Paramount reported any of this, not even the fact that as early as August 3, the British Government had immediately accepted the French idea of non-intervention on its initial presentation. The diplomatic activity in August was apparently ignored and although the Non-Intervention Committee met on September 9, in London of all places, there was no mention of it whatsoever in either of these two newsreels. Gaumont and Paramount did not even acknowledge the existence of the Non-Intervention Committee until the beginning of 1937. The omission is difficult to account for. The British press covered its every move and indeed newspapers such as The Times contained the complete official communiqués issued by the Committee as well as one from Lord Plymouth stating the reasons for Britain's response which read:

The chief concern of the United Kingdom Government in consenting to the establishment in London of the Committee (for non-intervention) had been to prevent the civil war from spreading beyond the Spanish frontiers and to secure a measure of cooperation among the Powers in what threatened to become a most dangerous international situation.³²

Yet in 1936 the newsreels seemed strangely reluctant to report such opinions openly or to report the activities of the Non-Intervention Committee, perhaps because during this time the apparent diplomatic successes at the conference

32. The Times, October 24, 1936.

table were being so blatantly disregarded in reality. And in August 1936, Gaumont obviously felt that a story such as the Blonde Amazon was sufficient to endorse the common feeling against war in general and against British involvement in Spain by implication.

For Gaumont's part their next story, after the Blonde Amazon, that was seen to display an inclination towards an avowal of peace appeared with issue 277.³³ This report began with a story on the war that covered Seville where Franco and Queipo de Llano were unveiling the monarchist flag, Algeciras with the damage to the British Consulate, and ended in Madrid where "all the hospitals are full of wounded". It noted that "Madam Azana, the wife of the President, has organised and equipped a special building for the reception of emergency cases", and concluded with shots of special armoured trains which apparently were in use on the Talavera front,³⁴ before the collapse of that city and its capture by General Yague on September 4.

What is most notable about the item is the position it holds within the release. The opening and closing stories were generally held by the newsreel industry to be the positions most likely to capture the public's imagination, or to leave it with the most enduring images of the incidents portrayed. This particular item is given first

33. GB Issue No.277.

34. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.265.

position, and, no doubt deliberately, succeeded by a story entitled "I Hate War" which contains a speech to that effect by President Roosevelt. In fact Roosevelt is recounting his personal horror of war as evinced by his own experiences in Europe during the First World War. Nowhere does he make any explicit reference to the Spanish situation, though probably Spain was at the forefront of his mind. For on August 5, his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, had made it known that the American Government would adhere to a strict policy of non-intervention. Indeed America's position was so avowedly neutral that she did not even take part in the Non-Intervention Committee.

To make matters more explicit the introductory speech overlaid by the Gaumont commentator announced: "While Europe is disturbed, President Roosevelt talks of peace". For the purposes of the British audience Ted Emmett, the editor and commentator, did an excellent job of tying Roosevelt's speech directly in with the opening story on Spain. By the simple use of juxtaposition Emmett has used the second story to build upon and enhance the latent message contained in the first item.

It is a trick Emmett put to even greater effect in the next issue which was released on August 27.³⁵ For this issue contains six stories amounting to some 672 feet of film. Of these six stories, the last three refer directly or indirectly to Spain: item four contains 32 feet of

35. GB Issue No.278, 27/8/36.

film in a story entitled "First British Ambulance leaves for Spain"; item five contains 82 feet of film in a piece called "Spanish Civil War Eighth Edition. Captain Juber with Government troops at Azaila"; and item six, the final story, draws Spain into a report entitled "Wonderful Britain", which lasts for 274 feet.

The two penultimate stories, referring directly to Spain, draw a simple contrast between a Britain intent upon furthering the cause of peace, and a Spain at war. Emmett describes the short scene with the British ambulance as "The Mayor of Holborn wishes God Speed to the British Ambulance Unit leaving London" and then in turn endorses the action on behalf of Gaumont by adding "With a handshake the brave adventure of these ambulance men has started, and we too wish them the best of luck." Then he proceeds to cut immediately to a battlefront in Spain with the words "In Spain itself life goes on as has by now become normal. Cavalry advancing means the evacuation of towns and villages by those of the civilian population not engaged in the fighting." The remainder of the story is somewhat short in comparison to earlier stories on Spain as Emmett narrates that "On the Saragossa front our cameraman has followed the troops commanded by Captain Juber." In conclusion he states that "These pictures were obtained in Azaila when an action was in progress against the rebels" but characteristically he does not fail to add that the action depicted is "one of the many life and death struggles which are the daily experience of Spain in this

year of Grace."

The real effect of the contrast between Britain and Spain is felt in the final story, with the title "Wonderful Britain", for this begins with the words "At this time when the agony of Spain streaks like a jagged scar across the face of Europe, it is well to pause and reflect upon the position of the world today." This introduction serves as an excuse for a fleeting mention of Abyssinia, "so recently wracked with the torments of awful war" and then "From Abyssinia our review takes us to Palestine, where racial factions clash unhappily day by day, where riot and slaughter crowd an all-too-complete programme of misery and despair." The commentary is accompanied by the appropriate shots of mayhem and destruction only to be brought to an abrupt end by shots of a tranquil Britain over which Emmett adds in a suitably patriotic tone; "In a spirit not of boastfulness but rather of gratitude we turn from these fitful scenes to fortunate Britain, still, with its tradition of sanity, the rock of steadying influences amid the eddying stream of world affairs."

By this point, on the face of it, the contrast between Spain and Britain has been lost. But the two previous stories on Spain have proved to be of immense use, for in showing Britain coming to the aid of a Spain in plight then in showing a Spain ravaged by war, Emmett is able to proceed into a stirring eulogy on a Britain at peace. The recurrent image of Britain as a "rock", akin to earlier

newsreel stories, is amply expanded in this report which goes on to recount a domestic tale of trade recovery and increased prestige:

Britain's industries have shaken off the chains that kept them fettered in the aftermath of the World War. They have risen from the Slough of Despond which clogged the wheels of progress in the Depression of the last decade. Trade returns are steadily improving. Weekly and monthly the official statistics form a heartening accompaniment to the efforts alike of the small merchant and the big boss of giant industry to better times. Our railways today stand second to none. Shipbuilding yards, for many years hushed in the inertia of unemployment, have been given a lead by the triumphant completion of the Queen Mary, now unquestionably supreme upon the mercantile lanes of the sea.

One could be forgiven for thinking that this story on "Wonderful Britain" comprised a segment of a Party Political Broadcast on behalf of the Government of the day were it not for the fact that there was no General Election in August 1936 and that the newsreels did not carry such broadcasts. For this is indeed propaganda and must stand well in comparison with the overtly patriotic newsreels and documentary shorts made during the Second World War, at a time when the filmmakers were openly proclaiming that their "first object is the putting across, in the best possible film terms, of any message of morale, information or propaganda which Government departments and other official bodies might from time to time think desirable."³⁶ Of course in the case of this Gaumont newsreel there is no

36. "Where do we stand?", Documentary News Letter, Vol.2, No.6, June 1941, p.103.

evidence of any Government instigation to produce such a story, as there would be in time of war. But then there would not need to be with such an eloquent spokesman as Ted Emmett in charge of production. Nor can it be chance alone that prompted Gaumont to produce such a story at a time when British statesmen were pursuing a course of action to ensure that this country was not drawn into a general European war as a result of the turmoil in Spain. Gaumont evidently felt that they had a part to play in leading public opinion. They revealed the tragedy of the War in Spain with all its repercussions for Spanish society, then they showed a peaceful Britain in the midst of increasing prosperity. The implication was that this country was in danger of losing "its tradition of sanity" and its position as "the rock of steadying influences amid the eddying stream of world affairs" if it pursued a policy other than the one which the Government was pursuing at the time.

After the initial voluminous coverage of the Civil War by Gaumont and Paramount during the first month and a half, by contrast the end of August and the beginning of September were comparatively quiet. The story was no longer "hot" in newsreel terms and therefore Gaumont carried no report at all in its issue for August 31. This was for only the second time in a run of eleven consecutive issues; nor did it do so on September 7, a week later. Paramount, for its part, had failed to carry stories on Spain in only two out of a possible eight issues during the

month of August, but during September it made no mention whatsoever in five out of eight releases.

On the military front the beginning of September proved to be disastrous for the Republic and the newsreels naturally tended to reflect that fact. But since the War was obviously nowhere nearer to an end they were compelled to cover it campaign by campaign and such a task necessarily lent itself to exaggeration in order to sustain audience interest. This was shown in Gaumont issue 280³⁷ which began with the words "Our cameraman at Irun and Saragossa has sent back dramatic pictures of the fighting in the key areas of the Spanish Civil War, the fate of these towns determines the fate of Spain." Certainly both towns were important, but not that much so. However at least both companies must be credited with keeping up with events. General Mola, with the Army of the North, was conducting a campaign against the Basque provinces of Guipuzcoa with the aim of securing Irun and San Sebastian, thereby cutting off the Basque corridor with France. The Nationalists had begun a sea bombardment of San Sebastian on August 17 and Paramount first showed film of its damaged harbour in the release for August 24,³⁸ then followed this up with footage of the land fighting around the city in its issue for

37. GB Issue No.280, 3/9/36. "Rebels take outpost of hilltop near Burgos".

38. BP Issue No.573.

August 31.³⁹ Gaumont's release for September 3⁴⁰ commented: "At San Sebastian Government troops are seen raiding a farmhouse where the occupants, suspected of Rebel activities, are captured, searched and taken away. Not far away towns and villages are blazing under the incendiary bombs of air-raiders." But San Sebastian did not actually fall until September 13 and in the meantime the newsreels' centre of attention had turned to Irun, which fell on September 4. Three days afterwards, bearing witness to the speed with which the newsreel despatches were now reaching the cinema screen, Paramount acknowledged the Nationalist victory in a story entitled "Rebels take Irun".⁴¹ The report further highlighted the growing importance in this war of aerial bombardment with shots of Nationalist planes attacking the city. Gaumont chose to emphasise the devastation as Emmett recounted that it was "Once a proud city, now a smoking ruin". He elaborated on this theme by showing:

Refugees fleeing into the safety of France, over the international bridge and across the river; from the inferno of gun-fire dealing death and mutilation, into the sanctity of a neutral land; that is the best that can be offered to the wretched peoples of Spain today. That proud city is a mass of debris, a mournful

39. BP Issue No.575.

40. GB Issue No.280.

41. BP Issue No.577.

monument to the savagery of war, its heartbreak and desolation. Once again we give you a burning example of war's futility.⁴²

Yet if the military advances and setbacks were the major preoccupations of both these newsreel companies, simply because they provided the most visually captivating and dramatic film material, the political repercussions for the Republic and Nationalists alike, during the month of September, were not entirely ignored. On September 12 the Nationalist junta voted for the war to be conducted under a single command and Franco was elected as the General at the head of this single command. Gaumont indirectly acknowledged the appointment two days later with a short story in which Franco was recognised as "the leader of the uprising" and in which he went on to speak "fervently for the microphone." Somewhat humorously Emmett noted that Franco spoke "unfortunately, in Spanish"⁴³ and no effort was made by Gaumont to translate anything of what he said into English. Similarly the change in Republican leadership which had taken place on September 4 was fleetingly recognised by Gaumont in issue 284⁴⁴ which commented:

42. GB Issue No.282, 10/9/36. "Irun in Ruins".

43. GB Issue No.283, 14/9/36. "Roving Camera Reports, Spanish Revolution".

44. GB Issue No.284, 17/9/36. "Spain".

"After the capture of Irun by the Rebels, the Government was replaced by its Socialist counterpart." Largo Caballero's new Government was predominantly Socialist and comprised six Socialists, two Communists, two members of the Republican Left and one each from the Republican Union and the Catalan Esquerra. But Emmett also invested it with an aura of instability as he went on to note that "already a plot against the life of its head, Senor Largo Caballero, has been unearthed."

Political personalities were not considered to be the most engaging form of entertainment. Whereas in July and August, stories on Spain had consistently occupied positions of eminence in the newsreels, with a length approaching as much as 230 feet on something like the Blonde Amazon, by September reports from Spain appeared only in the less valuable middle ground. Indeed the coverage of Franco's accession to military command was relegated to a section entitled "Roving Camera Reports" which consisted of four or five snippets and was tantamount to the briefest mention possible. In this slot it ran to barely 32 feet. The Spanish Civil War was dying as far as its news-bearing potential was concerned and might actually have done so, were it not for the fact that a new story on the siege of the Alcazar at Toledo broke. The first mention of it appeared in Gaumont issue 285⁴⁵ and the

45. GB Issue No.285, 21/9/36. "Rebel troops enter San Sebastian".

story began by drawing a contrast between the respective Republican defeats at Irun and San Sebastian. The Basques had surrendered San Sebastian to the Nationalists with little opposition and had actually gone so far as to shoot a band of Anarchists who wished to destroy the city before the enemy arrived. Emmett's commentary underlined the point:

Shelled by the Insurgent army's artillery and bombed by its planes, captured Irun presents a sorry spectacle. San Sebastian too has fallen, but the holiday resort known to so many foreign visitors as a gay and beautiful place has not shared the fate of Irun.

The commentary elaborates further with scenes as "the Carlist troops, entering in triumph, were greeted with wild cheering by the civilian population". It then proceeds to add: "From the Government side came reports of a tragedy so overwhelming as to defy description. The historic fortress, beleaguered for two months, has been mined and blown to pieces". The visual succession from a city in ruins, to a city saved from destruction amid joyous celebrations, and back finally to a city besieged and mined, is effectively complete. But what is also interesting to note is the mention of the aerial bombardment of Irun. For Gaumont's next issue⁴⁶ took up the matter of aerial warfare in greater

46. GB Issue No.286, 24/9/36. "Italian aircraft brought down in Spanish Civil War".

detail stating: "Aeroplanes continually combing the key roads to Madrid set fire to fields of wheat and rendered homeless and desolate many innocent victims". Clearly aerial warfare was becoming recognised as a new force to be reckoned with. But what is not adequately explained in this story is precisely who the aeroplanes were fighting for. The script comments that "A plane was brought down with its petrol tank riddled with bullets" and it further acknowledges: "The pilot was Italian". But then it concludes: "Nobody was able to find out which side he was fighting on".

There may well have been valid reasons why it proved difficult to establish the identity of the plane or pilot, or his military allegiance. Yet at the very least common sense might have dictated to Gaumont that the Republic was not likely to be bombing its own sources of food around Madrid. Furthermore it is unusual that Gaumont, who were normally so reliable because of their massive news-gathering capacity, were not able in this instance to ascertain the provenance of one plane. Italian Capronis, flying for Franco, had been instrumental in the bombing of Irun. Gaumont had actually shown film of them doing so, though without going so far as to identify them. And little more than a month later, in a somewhat similar situation, Paramount cameramen verified that a "Red aeroplane", flying for the Republic, was shot down and its pilot captured by the Nationalists.⁴⁷

47. BP Issue No.592, 29/10/36. "Madrid cut off".

The newsreel policy on foreign intervention in Spain was very similar to its policy regarding the existence of the Non-Intervention Committee, the less said the better. And if it was possible to get away without saying anything at all, then nobody could be offended. Over foreign intervention the newsreels appear to have endorsed the government line, which was to officially ignore the facts, despite the evidence put forward by press and politicians:

Government spokesmen in France and Britain who were committed to supporting non-intervention were very unwilling to admit the facts of German and Italian intervention. Question time in the House of Commons often became heated and prolonged as members of the Opposition attempted to wring from the Government an admission that intervention was taking place which would prove that the official policy of non-intervention was a failure. Reports of equipment and men sent into Spain which appeared continually in the press were officially ignored until the facts themselves became too self-evident.⁴⁸

In the case of the newsreels, even when the facts over foreign intervention were self-evident, they refused to acknowledge them publicly. And after all the facts about Italian intervention had been learned very early on in the war:

The first public knowledge of intervention came on July 30 when three Italian planes made forced landings in French Morocco on their way to join General Franco.⁴⁹

48. P.A.M. van der Esch, Prelude to War, The Hague 1951, pp.36-37.

49. Ibid., p.35.

The official enquiry set up by the French Government had established their identity by the simple expedient of examining the papers that the Italian crews had carried with them.

The News Chronicle and the Manchester Guardian were just two of the British newspapers which reported the facts about German intervention. For example, during the first weeks of the Civil War, a News Chronicle journalist who was based in Lisbon witnessed eight hundred tons of arms and oil being unloaded from the German ship Kamerun. The war materials were then sent on by train into Spain.⁵⁰ Furthermore the Manchester Guardian estimated that by the end of 1936, there were approximately fourteen thousand members of the Condor Legion in Spain, comprising technicians, pilots and signals detachments.⁵¹ Nor indeed can the charge be levelled at the Guardian that because of their obvious political affinities, they were inclined to over-estimate the numbers. For the figures were based upon the estimates given to them by Anthony Crossley, the Conservative Member of Parliament, who visited Nationalist Spain in December, 1936.

Indeed the facts about foreign intervention were officially recognised with the publication in London, in October 1936, of the findings of the Committee of Inquiry

50. The News Chronicle, August 25, 1936.

51. The Manchester Guardian, January 2, 1937.

into Breaches of International Law in Spain. For the committee reported evidence of German intervention from British subjects who had been in Spain during the month of August. Yet for all this welter of information the British newsreels adamantly refused to make any mention of intervention in their reports.

The siege of the Alcazar at Toledo continued to command the better part of the newsreels' attention in the second half of September, just as it did for Franco. Professor Hugh Thomas has advanced two reasons why Franco determined on September 21 to postpone the advance upon Madrid in order to break the Republican siege of the Alcazar. He considers that "the lure of the Toledo arms factory was probably the determining cause of the Nationalist diversion" but to Franco "the spiritual (or propaganda) advantage of relieving Moscardo" was equally very important.⁵² The military factor might well have been the prime cause but to judge from the newsreel space expanded on the relief, Franco's latter purpose was thoroughly vindicated. For the siege, which had begun on July 20, and the subsequent relief, which ended after more than two months on September 27, were well and truly suited to the sensational and dramatic treatment afforded by the cinema. Paramount, for instance, had not released a report on Spain since September 7, then on September 21 it issued

52. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.282.

a story as "the survivors of the fortress garrison still hold out after sixty three days siege"⁵³ and immediately followed this up with a piece on the mining of the Alcazar.⁵⁴ Gaumont followed the events even more closely. A short piece in issue 284 recounted that "the Government called upon miners to sling dynamite among the Rebel defenders";⁵⁵ their next issue noted, "The historic fortress of the Alcazar, beleaguered for two months, has been mined and blown to pieces".⁵⁶ The subsequent coverage expressed surprise that "Even after the fortress of the Alcazar was shattered by mines; surviving defenders returned a spasmodic rifle fire. From the courtyard of the old Santa Cruz convent comes one of the constant stream of victims mortally wounded."⁵⁷ This last story also revealed how important a part the Alcazar had begun to play in Republican thinking. On September 20, Largo Caballero arrived in Toledo and demanded of his officers that the Alcazar be captured within twenty-four hours. Gaumont filmed his arrival and announced that "The Prime Minister, Senor Largo Caballero, who has personally taken charge, toured the destroyed area

53. BP Issue No.581, 21/9/36. "Alcazar blown up".

54. BP Issue No.582, 24/9/36. "Alcazar mined".

55. GB Issue No.284.

56. GB Issue No.285.

57. GB Issue No.287, 28/9/36. "Ruins of the Alcazar".

while refugees fled to what little safety is still left in Spain."

In the event the Nationalist General Varela relieved the city on September 28. But neither Gaumont nor Paramount showed anything of the relief until they had secured footage of Franco actually touring the captured city. The reason for this is probably explained in the Paramount release for October 5.⁵⁸ For here, apart from showing "The first pictures of the survivors as the Insurgents take the city", there was also a short piece announcing that General Franco had now been proclaimed "Head of Government", an event which had occurred at a meeting of the Nationalist junta in Salamanca on September 29. In fact by the time that a decree was issued in Nationalist Spain on October 1, Franco was being installed in Burgos as the Head of State, but such niceties escaped the eye of Paramount as much as they seem to have eluded the junta, who thought that they had agreed to Franco only being made Head of the Government.⁵⁹

Gaumont also announced "The Relief of Toledo" in their issue for October 5 in an exciting story which allowed Ted Emmett to display his undoubted expertise as commentator and editor.⁶⁰ It ran:

58. BP Issue No.585, 5/10/36. "Alcazar relieved".

59. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.286.

60. GB Issue No.289, 5/10/36. "Toledo relieved by Rebels".

On the road to Toledo our cameraman secured these vivid pictures of the Insurgents' advance to relieve their comrades besieged in the Alcazar fortress for seventy-one days. The wreckage of an occasional aeroplane, grim though it is, pales into insignificance as the awful ruin of the Alcazar comes into view. Cautiously the Rebel troops advance, expecting every corner to send a whistling messenger of death. The historic siege of the Alcazar is ended. General Franco, accompanied by gaunt and bearded General Moscardo, who commanded the beleaguered garrison, walks in grim silence through the shattered streets. Amid the ruins, haggard inhabitants of the city siege eat and exercise after many weeks of imprisonment and semi-starvation. General Franco spoke with great emotion to the troops who had scarcely strength enough to attention. In a story of the horrors that war inevitably brings, this has been the most terrible of all.

This report admirably shows the difference in presentation of the news by Paramount and Gaumont. Paramount chose to show their film in three consecutive stories, each one of which displayed footage relevant to the most recent developments in both the siege and the relief. Gaumont pursued the same course though they also rounded off the whole incident with a long story entitled "The Relief of Toledo", some 147 feet in length, which was given pride of place at the opening of the release and which attempted to lead the audience through the final stages of the ordeal in one all-embracing story. It also appears from the visual montage in the Gaumont story that Franco was present in person at the actual relief, which was not the case, thereby giving his role greater symbolic value. Inadvertently the film also bears witness to the important part played by the Army of Africa in this campaign, since the shots

of the 'Insurgents' advance to relieve their comrades" centre upon Moorish troops.

The siege of the Alcazar had a great emotional impact outside Spain, as well as within the Nationalist and Republican camps. The newsreels show that, but so also does the fact that it inspired feature film producers in the commercial cinema to consider using it as the basis for fictional scenarios. In December 1936, Twentieth-Century Fox announced that they had scheduled for production a film bearing the title "The Siege of the Alcazar". The producer, Darryl F. Zanuck, was reported as saying that "Its heroism has thrilled the world". As it happened the project was shelved but not before Ivor Montagu was prompted to write an open letter to Mr. Zanuck in the pages of World Film News where he pointed out "the dangers of one-sided treatment".⁶¹ One film that was finally produced came from Italy in 1939 entitled "L'Assedio dell' Alcazar" and was directed by Augusto Genina. For all its attempts at historical veracity, this film understandably vindicates the heroic cause of the Nationalist defenders.⁶²

The Alcazar at Toledo had not been the only Insurgent garrison under siege throughout September. Colonel Aranda,

61. Ivor Montagu, "The Siege of the Alcazar", World Film News, Vol.1 No.10, Jan. 1937, pp.10-11.

62. Isaksson and Furhammer, Politics and Film, pp.50-51.

along with a contingent of Asaltos, Falangists and Civil Guards had been pinned down in Oviedo by Asturian miners since July 20. But Oviedo's relief on October 16 merited simply a short report in Gaumont issue 295.⁶³ Now a single, solitary Nationalist garrison, defending a monastery near to Cordoba remained inside Republican territory and so Franco's forces turned in earnest upon Madrid. Once again the centre of newsreel attention focused upon Madrid. The newsreel companies evidently felt that the capture of the capital was imminent. Paramount showed shots of Franco and his forces closing in upon the city, then cut to scenes within the city itself showing Largo Caballero and numerous shots of lorries loaded with cannon, and buses filled with troops, as they set out for the front.⁶⁴ On November 2, Paramount's next release again took place in Madrid but highlighted the work of a Scottish Ambulance Unit, ferrying casualties to a hospital, on what was to prove to be its last trip before being bombed.⁶⁵

Gaumont too highlighted the plight of the city. A Roving Camera Report for November 5⁶⁶ noted: "Madrid becomes

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- 63. GB Issue No.295, 26/10/36. "Rebel troops relieve Oviedo".
 - 64. BP Issue No.592.
 - 65. BP Issue No.593, 2/11/36. "Scots bombed in Spain".
 - 66. GB Issue No.298, 5/11/36. "Roving Camera Reports, Madrid entrenched".

once more the centre of world interest as Government forces prepared to make a last stand against the encircling Insurgent forces. Trenches built around the city are filled with militia, awaiting the decisive hour in Spanish history." This time the newsreels were right. Madrid was very much in danger of being overrun and the Government of Largo Caballero determined to leave on November 6 for Valencia, a move which seemed to confirm suspicions that the city would fall. As a result Gaumont's newsreel for November 9⁶⁷ went so far as to announce "The Fall of Madrid". Of course this was pure speculation on their part, though not without some basis in reality. Obviously Gaumont believed this event to be a foregone conclusion and they intended to make a scoop of it. Yet for all their haste, they were careful enough not to commit themselves too far on this story. There was always the danger that if they put forth an uncompromising story on the fall of Madrid, and it proved to be wrong or hopelessly premature, then their credibility as news-gatherers would suffer. So the story was relegated to a minor position in the overall release. The opening title still proclaimed "The Fall of Madrid" but after that the succeeding montage of commentary and film was subtly constructed by Emmett in such a way that nobody openly reiterated the point. The commentary ran:

67. GB Issue No.299, 9/11/36. "The Fall of Madrid".

Madrid, the capital city of the country of despair. The Rebels have achieved their big coup in the story of wracked and tortured Spain. Bombed from the skies and shelled almost without pause, the lot of civilians is more easily imagined than described. The Government's War Minister and Premier, Largo Caballero, has fled from Madrid while only a few of his troops remained to put up a weak resistance against the forces of General Franco. Foreign Legionaries and Moors advanced to print another chapter in the history of unhappy Spain.

Only at one point in the script does Emmett actually make an incorrect statement. Important ministers, civil servants and politicians had indeed left the city, but there is no evidence of any Republican troops leaving as well. On the contrary the city's Republican forces had been supplemented at the end of October by Russian tanks, aircraft and their crews. And within two days of Largo Caballero's departure on November 6, the first units of the newly formed International Brigade arrived in the city. Neither of these factors were mentioned since the British newsreels appeared to be maintaining a strict silence about acknowledging the presence of foreign troops on either side in Spain, apart from the Moorish troops that constituted the Army of Africa. But where this Gaumont story does mislead is in the juxtaposition of commentary and accompanying film. It is noticeable, for instance, at the point where the script says "a weak resistance against the forces of General Franco", there are shots of General Franco walking up the steps into a building. These shots are actually of Franco at Burgos and had been first used in Gaumont's release for August 20. In their new context they make it

appear as though Franco had entered Madrid in triumph, all the more so since the opening shots to the story show the advance of victorious Nationalist troops and a beleaguered Madrid. As it stands the visual montage looks very much as though Franco is entering a building in Madrid, after capturing the city, and it is left to the audience to draw this implication without the commentary ever explicitly stating such a fact.

So it was that when Madrid did not fall, Gaumont simply resorted to stories on the defence of Madrid, such as GB issue 300⁶⁸ which stated that "many of the inhabitants have fled, but those remaining bend every muscle and sinew to resist the invader. Round Madrid the circle of death closes, spare a moment to pity them." Or stories such as GB issue 302⁶⁹ which recounted: "Insurgent troops encircling the capital concentrate their efforts on one big push with all the forces at their disposal. General Varela seems to be happy and confident as he discusses the plan of campaign." Clearly Gaumont appeared in no way embarrassed by their mistake despite the fact that it had been noticed. World Film News for December, 1936, commented:

An incredible blunder was made by all the newsreels in their issues dated November 9;

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- 68. GB Issue No.300, 12/11/36. "Insurgents advance on Madrid".
 - 69. GB Issue No.302, 19/11/36. "Roving Camera Reports, Insurgents encircle and bomb Madrid".

apparently suffering from a surfeit of 'intelligent anticipation' they announced the fall of Madrid and some even included shots purporting to show the entry of Franco's troops into the city.

The newsreels had entirely miscalculated the capacity of the Government forces to defend the Capital. This is not the first time that their information about Spain has been inaccurate and ill-informed. Maybe it will teach them a lesson.⁷⁰

World Film News has also made a mistake, however, in their condemnation. For Paramount had not been party to the blunder. In fact since their report on the Scottish Ambulance Unit on November 2, Paramount had made no mention of Spain. It did not do so until November 16 where there was reference to Spaniards convalescing in Moscow as part of a compilation entitled "Where Stands Peace?"⁷¹

Paramount's commentaries were for the most part simply descriptive in character, containing little in the way of comment, and certainly displaying none of the literary flourishes that Ted Emmett injected into his scripts for Gaumont. Paramount's scriptwriters were not the same people who read the commentaries. The latter personalities remained anonymous. Furthermore their editors were different people again. The Paramount system of production was very much compartmentalised with each

70. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.1, No.9, December 1936, p.40.

71. BP Issue No.597, 16/11/36. "Where Stands Peace?".

band of people contributing their respective talents to the final products. This made their reports somewhat diffuse and lacking in coherence. Occasionally, though, the company was capable of producing an impressive newsreel compilation which drew upon several pieces of library material in order to convey a simple yet effective message. "Where Stands Peace?" is one such story.

The sub-title to the story was "Nations arm and ally" and it covered three locations: Vienna, Warsaw and Moscow. It began with the visit of Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, to Vienna. He is dressed in a Fascist uniform and proceeds to inspect Austrian troops, finally addressing them with the Fascist salute. The story then cuts to Warsaw where Marshall Ritz Smigly and President Machisky take the salute before a parade of Polish soldiers. The commentary states that "Marshall Ritz Smigly, newly appointed Head of the Army, co-operates with President Machisky to increase the country's forces to nearly 300,000." The reason given for such an action is that "A buffer state between Germany and Russia, two formidable nations unfriendly to each other, Poland treads warily" though the commentator notes that "Ritz Smigly has the army and people behind him in his determination that in any event, Polish independence shall be preserved." The final location is Moscow where once again the visual emphasis is on a huge military parade at which the salute is taken by Stalin and Voroshilov. The occasion is the

nineteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the script notes: "A million and a half troops pass through the Red Square, Moscow, watched with interest by many foreign military attachés, a British representative among them." At this point passing reference is made to a band of convalescent Spanish soldiers, in Republican uniform, watching the proceedings and applauding, while the commentator adds that "Spaniards, who had fought in their Civil War, a woman included, are given front seats."

The final shots are of the parade with tanks advancing towards the camera, the crowd cheering and a concluding view of planes flying overhead. But the real point of this story, which visually depends so much upon an assemblage of military power, is aptly summarised in the concluding sentence of the commentary which recounts that "As in 1914, Europe stands upon a sword hilt; everywhere the nations are on the march; one thing is plain, no ordinary citizen in any country wants war." By putting a reference to Spain in the midst of the story, Spain is seen to be part of a general European context which might at any time explode and lead to war.

The role of Britain in this European context was spelt out very clearly a week later by Paramount with a speech by Baldwin entitled "Premier takes stock, finds Britain best"⁷² during the course of which he said:

72. BP Issue No.599, 23/11/36. "Premier takes stock, finds Britain best".

In many countries abroad we see fear and suspicion, economic and industrial depression, the destruction of liberty and freedom, conscription on an increasing scale, violence and disturbance, and in Spain we witness the climax in the terrible horrors of Civil War. Contrast these conditions with the peace and prosperity of our own country. For five years we have enjoyed a steady industrial recovery which is still continuing. In the first nine months of this year, employment increased by well over half a million. We have steered clear of Fascism, Communism, dictatorship. We have shown the world that Democratic government, constitutional methods and ordered liberty are not inconsistent with progress and prosperity.

Both Paramount and Gaumont used this speech in their respective issues for November 23. The line that these newsreels had put forward, with regard to the Civil War in Spain, the implications of that War for the rest of Europe, and finally the role of Britain throughout the turmoil, are here manifested in a speech from the Prime Minister of the day. The contrast is complete: Spain is in chaos as a result of the strife and devastation of Civil War, Europe on the verge of rearming, and Britain in the midst of "peace and prosperity" with the obvious corollary that in order to sustain such a tranquil state of affairs this country should stay out of any potential altercations. It is "Wonderful Britain" all over again and the opinions of the newsreels are seen to be vindicated by the leading figure in the Establishment. Indeed even the setting for Baldwin's speech was infused with comfortable reassurance, for the Prime Minister was sitting at his desk in a traditional oak-panelled study. The speech itself was delivered straight at the camera and though Baldwin's

presentation of it is unexciting and by no means impressive, at least it is put across with calm and confidence in a thoroughly straightforward, if somewhat deadpan, manner.

Even at the time of delivery of this speech by Baldwin, the Establishment itself was in danger of being undermined by the impending Abdication Crisis and it is perhaps worthwhile digressing from the Spanish Civil War at this point in order to see how inherently conservative the newsreels could be in their coverage of events. For the newsreels' answer to such a threat as the Abdication Crisis was simply not to report it, until the moment at which they could also announce something positive, such as to herald a new King. As World Film News put it: "With the entire British Press 'ostriching', it was too much to expect the infinitely more cowardly newsreels to take an independent line."⁷³ World Film News had done a survey of newsreel coverage on the Crisis and considered:

So badly had the newsreels got the jitters over the Constitutional Crisis that even when King Edward VIII abdicated, their specials were contemptible. None of them had the courage to face up to the issues involved and the attempt to use the Queen Mary angle plus stock shots of the new King to cover up their cowardice, impressed nobody.

But the main gist of their argument was summarised in the

73. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.1, No.10, January 1937, p.39.

conclusion:

The Crisis has clearly demonstrated that the newsreels are dependent upon and fearful of the magic word authority and that they are unable to fulfil their responsibilities to the public on an issue of domestic importance. When will one of the newsreels have the courage to break through?

In the heat of their invective World Film News had once again failed to avail themselves of all the facts. The brief analysis of the newsreel response was accurate as far as it went. But Paramount, with the independently minded Tom Cummings at its head, had actually prepared a story entitled "The King: Crisis" to go out in its issue for December 7. It included shots of Mrs. Simpson and a title which described her as "the American society woman, whom it is rumoured that the King intends to marry." In the final event they did not show the story and the Paramount library entry states, quite simply: "This story had to be withdrawn". No reason is given for the withdrawal in their records, but then it is not likely that Paramount would ever have gone so far as to record in their papers the reason why they might wish to withdraw such a story from circulation. Nor is it possible to discern from other sources precisely why the story was cut, as is the case when Paramount were compelled to excise the story they released on the Munich Crisis. It is possible that pressure was exerted by the Government in one form or another but such overt acts of

censorship were rare.⁷⁴ A more likely explanation is that the inherently conservative nature of the newsreel establishment precluded the coverage of incidents which could in any way be construed as controversial.⁷⁵ Nor did such an attitude necessarily always hide any political undertones but in all probability stemmed from a fear, possibly mistaken, that criticism and controversy in newsreel content would alienate the large cinemagoing audience. Ironically it was World Film News which pinpointed the dilemma inherent in the attitude of the men it continually castigated, when, a few months later, it commented:

On May 25 (1937), four men walked into the shining new offices of British Movietone in London's Soho Square. They were: R.S. Howard, Editor of Gaumont British News; Cecil Snape of Universal; Louis Behr of Pathé; and G.T. Cummings of Paramount. Inside they were met by Gerald Sanger, Movietone's Production Chief, for a hush-hush heart-to-heart. Within a few minutes they had reached complete agreement. The Wedding of the Duke of Windsor was barred from every screen in Britain. Britain's cinema addicts had lost the year's biggest story after the Coronation. The trade had lost the chance to pack every movie house in the country solid, for days on end.

So quickly did the newsreel's Big Five make their decision, that at first there were rumours of hands being forced by Government pressure, or

74. Neville March Hunnings cites examples of the few instances where censorship was openly imposed in Film Censors and the Law, pp.111-113.

75. The same opinion is put forward for consideration in Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, p.110 and in The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.140.

interference from powerful vested interests. Later information showed that they had acted entirely off their own bat. What underlying reasons led to the anti-Windsor policy?⁷⁶

This comment highlights two main factors in newsreel thinking. First of all, it shows the way in which the newsreel companies could close ranks, on their own initiative, to prevent any coverage whatsoever of matters they considered to be potentially controversial. For if the five largest newsreel companies did not cover an event then very few other newsreel companies would be likely to do so. And secondly, it reveals the sort of problems the newsreel companies encountered with regard to their decisions on what they should or should not cover. As business men they appreciated that there were vast amounts of money to be made by capitalising upon events which were very much in the public imagination. Yet they had to balance their natural response with the knowledge that coverage of controversial matters could in the long run be detrimental to their standing as gatherers and purveyors of the news. As The Factual Film put it some years later:

The cinema manager is said "not to want politics" on the screen being, as a business man, concerned to exhibit what the largest possible section of the public will pay for, rather than what might cause, through its immediate and pressing importance, expressions of conflicting reactions among the audience.⁷⁷

76. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.2, No.4, July 1937, p.29.

77. The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film, p.140.

The marriage of the Duke of Windsor might not in itself have been construed as "politics", but the events which brought it about certainly had profound political ramifications. As far as the newsreel companies were concerned there had evidently been enough "expressions of conflicting reactions". They were not prepared to rekindle public feelings on the Duke of Windsor's marriage to Mrs. Simpson, for the very same reason they had chosen not to exacerbate the situation by giving coverage to his abdication. They appreciated that to issue newsreel coverage on both these matters of intense public debate meant that their editorial comments might well be taken up and used by one side or the other. They chose to play it safe, once again.

The British Press reacted to the Abdication Crisis in much the same way as the newsreels. Indeed British wholesale newsagents even went to the lengths of cutting out most references to King Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson from American magazines in 1936 in order to ensure that there was no coverage.⁷⁸ Yet the true irony in the press response was that whereas the newsreels were vilified for their reaction, by the likes of World Film News, the press were applauded for taking a somewhat similar stand. The Report on the British Press, for instance, had the following things to say:

78. Political and Economic Planning, Report on the British Press, London 1938, p.51.

The biggest recent example was the Simpson crisis leading up to the abdication of King Edward VIII. The entire British Press was aware of most of the relevant facts long before a line on the subject appeared in the papers. It has sometimes been suggested that an official ban was enforced, but, if anything, the reverse was the case, as there were hints that there would be advantages in gradually accustoming the British public to the existence of the then Mrs. Simpson. So far as Ministers were concerned, a request from a Fleet Street quarter for a lead before the crisis broke met with no satisfaction. When Mrs. Simpson obtained her divorce decree the Press agreed on a common method of treatment, which gave some prominence to the event without explaining its significance to the uninitiated. Between the decree nisi and the actual breaking of the crisis, when overseas papers were already full of speculation, it gradually became apparent that some publicity was inevitable. Fleet Street hung back, no newspaper being anxious to act in isolation, and some at least awaiting a lead from The Times. It was obvious that any newspaper which came out with the story alone might be disastrously affected by an official denial if the affair could be settled behind the scenes. It was also evident that many readers would receive the news with a resentment which might prove dangerous to the newspaper concerned, as well as to the State. So it happened that the vast majority of British citizens remained, almost until the end, in total ignorance of matters which were to bring about a change in their allegiance, not because the Press did not know, and not because the Press was muzzled by an outside agency, but because the sense of responsibility of proprietors and editors, coupled with their fears of the dangers involved to their papers, were greater than their appetite for what could have been the greatest "scoop" in history. It is significant that in this crisis, failing a clear lead from the King, from the Government, or from the Church, Fleet Street eventually relied on the remarks of a Yorkshire bishop, rather cryptically reported in the northern Press, as an occasion for raising the issue. There has been, and no doubt will be, much disagreement whether Fleet Street acted wisely in showing so much restraint, but the fact that restraint was, without exception, shown, whatever the reasons, is at least evidence of the falsehood

of the common belief that there are London papers which will sacrifice anything for the sake of sensational news.⁷⁹

The pressures and process of decision making would appear to have been exactly the same for the press as they were for the newsreels. The outcome was that the press reported very little on the Abdication Crisis and the newsreels reported nothing at all, only that there was a new King. And as a further result the British public received little or nothing in the way of information from two of the most important outlets for news at the time.

It is easy to understand the attitude of the newsreel companies. For many reasons they were trying to prevent the sort of reaction which greeted the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor in Paris on September 27, 1937. For on that occasion the Daily Mirror reported that the couple arrived:

Without a cheer, without a smile from the dozen curious English and Americans who saw them arrive.

Yet the Daily Express commented:

More than four hundred Parisians welcomed their old "Prince Charming". With them were groups of British and Americans....An American woman called out "Long Live the American Duchess". The crowd cheered and the Duke waved.⁸⁰

79. P.E.P., Report on the British Press, p.260.

80. P.E.P., Report on the British Press, p.134.

These were the sorts of "expressions of conflicting reactions" that the newsreel companies were striving desperately hard to avoid. Instead they went for a consensus of silence.

It was the self same consensus of silence that had been apparent in Gaumont and Paramount's coverage of the first six months of the Spanish Civil War. Only there it had manifested itself with regard to such matters as foreign intervention and the Non-Intervention Committee.

Little was to change in the concluding weeks of 1936, yet the difference between the respective newsreel products of these two companies was admirably exemplified in the final weeks of the year.

Gaumont, for instance, continued to play upon the sense of personal plight and social devastation inherent in the Civil War, highlighting the effects caused by aerial bombing in its commentary for December 7:

Madrid in a state of siege shows the effect of constant bombing by Insurgent planes that fly over the Spanish capital by day and night. Ancient buildings, palaces, galleries containing priceless art treasures, all these bear witness to the marksmanship of the Rebel bombers. Citizens walk among the ruins which only a short while ago were normal stately buildings like those we know in London and our own big cities. Now there is food shortage, petrol shortage, leaking gas and burst mains. This, in short, is Civil War.⁸¹

81. GB Issue No.307, 7/12/36. "Madrid partially destroyed by Insurgent bombing".

The story is succinct, makes its point concisely, and once again draws out a comparison between a Madrid at war and a London at peace. But as always with Gaumont stories, it is notable for its omissions. There is no mention of the fact that most of the bombing of Madrid was being done **by** the German Condor Legion which had been assembled in Seville over a month earlier on November 6. It was the Condor Legion that from November 16 until November 19 conducted a systematic bombing campaign of the city in order to assess the reaction of the civilian population. Their bombing concentrated on densely populated zones where most panic would ensue and took place by day and night killing one thousand people in the process. Nor did Gaumont make any mention that it was the International Brigade which greatly contributed to the survival of Madrid from land assault during the same period.

Similarly Gaumont's issue 303 had manifested the same kind of omissions. On November 17 the Nationalists announced a blockade of Republican harbours. A primary motive in this move was to prevent war material reaching the Republican forces and to this end Franco maintained that his blockade would extend so far as to attack foreign ships found in Republican harbours. Such an action had important international implications, especially in Britain, where the Government announced on November 23 that legislation would be introduced which would prevent the carriage of arms to Spain in British ships from any port.

On that very same day Gaumont released its issue 303⁸² which commented that:

While the siege of Madrid was engaging the attention of all land forces in Spain, the world switched over its focus to the navy. With General Franco's threatened blockade of certain ports held by Government, cruisers and smaller vessels of the Loyalist fleet left Malaga to play their part. In the meantime all ships of foreign nationality have been warned to keep clear of such harbours as Barcelona. In Bilbao, Government ships are in action, surprising a group of boats transporting ammunition and confiscating the welcome spoils of war.

To judge from this story alone one would have little idea of the international implications of Franco's blockade, apart from the dire warning to steer clear of Republican harbours. In fact Britain was placed in a difficult spot by Franco's announcement, for British ships were entitled by international law to transport arms to Spain from foreign ports. If such ships were in Spanish territorial waters, then they came under Spanish law, but until actually reaching the point of demarcation they were able to call upon the British navy for assistance in the case of interference. The Nationalists's declaration stated that they would prevent arms reaching the Republic and, short of challenging the illegality of such an act, the only alternative for the British Government lay in granting Franco belligerent rights. The British Government wished to grant such a recognition. The French did not. The outcome was that

82. GB Issue No.303, 23/11/36. "Spanish Government ships leave Malaga".

Britain stepped down and, in its November 23 legislation, prohibited the transport of arms in British ships from all ports. But Gaumont turned their story on Franco's blockade into a purely foreign affair, concerning only internal Spanish matters. This was made all the more evident by the fact that the two incidents depicted in the release took place between Government and Nationalist ships.

Paramount continued to show their willingness to extend their horizons somewhat in their closing stories for 1936. At least issue 600⁸³ revealed further the connection between the Republic and Communist Russia, thereby enhancing the message they had hinted at in earlier reports on the arrival of the Russian Ambassador in Madrid, and the Spaniards recuperating in Moscow. For this new story followed the arrival of a Spanish delegation in Moscow where they were feted and greeted by Kalinin, the President of the Soviet Executive Council. In a typically characteristic fashion Paramount failed to capitalise upon what was on the face of it an adventurous story. Once again they had revealed a potential for securing the unusual story but failed to use it to probe deeper into the circumstances surrounding the issue. The accompanying commentary stated that the delegation was in Moscow for a meeting of the Communist United Front. Lest anyone should infer that the Spaniards were in Moscow to secure more aid, a fact which

83. BP Issue No.600, 26/11/36. "Soviets fete Spaniards".

the newsreels had not acknowledged, there was a short report earlier in the issue, which came as part of their News Flashes From Everywhere section, and which subtly pre-empted any such ideas. For this showed a Republican arms and munitions factory in Valencia, furiously turning out shells in abundance.⁸⁴ By contrast the British press were reporting the full extent of Soviet aid to Spain, in terms of munitions, money and men. At its simplest this manifested itself in a Daily Telegraph report, as early as early as August, on the "Spanish Levy" which was collected in Russian factories. The sum of £490,000 had then been transferred to Giral by the Moscow State Bank.⁸⁵

Likewise Paramount's next story on Spain which was released on December 14⁸⁶ makes the same sort of compromises. Actually this report did make advances, as well, in the coverage thus far of the War. First of all it began with film of the Spanish Parliament meeting for its first session at **Valencia** since leaving Madrid. After a general view of the Benicarlo Palace it spotlights numerous politicians as they arrive and among those singled out are Jesus Hernandez, the Minister of Education, Galarza, the Minister of the Interior, Alvarez del Vayo, the Foreign Secretary, the Premier, Largo Caballero, and the President, Azana.

84. BP Issue No.600 26/11/36. "News Flashes From Everywhere. Valencia".

85. The Daily Telegraph, August 7, 1936.

86. BP Issue No.605, 14/12/36. "Refugees fill Valencia as Cortes meets".

There follows interior shots of the cabinet ministers talking together and then the film cuts to a shot of the Parliament meeting in assembly with close-ups of Martinez Barrio delivering a speech, to be greeted with applause as he concludes. The commentator narrates the events as they appear but also adds that the cabinet has rejected an Anglo-French offer to mediate in the War. The offer of mediation referred to had been made on December 4 to Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Russia. The intention was that an armistice should be put into operation, a commission should be sent to Spain, a plebiscite should be called, and a Government set up composed of men who had kept out of the Civil War. But by December 11 the mediation proposal had been rejected by the Nationalists, as well as the Republicans, a point not mentioned by Paramount's report, and the mediation plan was dropped. Paramount had, however, failed to state that there were at the time two other Franco-British moves being suggested. One was for controlling breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement by placing observers at Spanish ports and frontiers. The other was to stop volunteers going to Spain. Both suggestions had emanated at the Non-Intervention Committee from the British representative, Lord Plymouth. Since Paramount, like Gaumont, had so far made no mention of the existence of the Non-Intervention Committee, it could not now report two of the recommendations being put forward for its consideration. Instead it chose to mention the mediation proposal put

forward outside of the Committee by the British and French Governments. Furthermore it reported this suggestion within a story on Spain itself and proceeded to show the consequences within that country of their Government's refusal to adhere to the idea omitting to mention that the Nationalist cause had also rejected such mediation. For after the shots of the meeting of the Spanish Cortes, the story cuts to reveal more footage of "terror-stricken" refugees pouring into Valencia. Although it is never explicitly stated as such, the montage of film and commentary is constructed so that a British audience could not have failed to infer that the Republican Government had failed in its duty to protect the people of Spain from further hardship. The Anglo-French initiative might have failed as well but at least Britain is seen as having performed honourably in the circumstances by putting forward the plan for mediation. The fact that the plan had first been proposed to Eden by Delbos, the French Foreign Secretary, is conveniently forgotten.

All newsreel editions for December 28, 1936, brought with them their companies' annual "Review of the Year". Rather than deal with the events of the year chronologically, Gaumont chose instead to group the happenings under general headings such as "Home Affairs", "Sport", "Disaster", and "Foreign Affairs", in their issue 313.⁸⁷ The largest

87. GB Issue No.313, 28/12/36. "Review of the Year. Foreign Affairs".

section was "Foreign Affairs" with 234 feet of film devoted to it out of a total of 873 feet allotted to the entire release. Yet Spain took up one short sentence with Emmett's script reiterating the gist of his message throughout the year. He said: "Then Spain, unhappy Spain, the lazy, sunny garden of Europe, locked itself in the death struggle between brother and brother." Despite the brevity of such an insert, in fact the piece still showed Gaumont's sense of economy and production prowess for as one film critic said of the release: "One shot of a weeping mother with her children conveys all the horror of the Spanish Civil War better than a whole battery."⁸⁸

Paramount by comparison chose to devote 96 feet of film to their Spanish story alone, preferring to follow the year through chronologically.⁸⁹ They culled numerous shots from their stock shot library. They included Moroccan troops marching into Burgos, with close ups of Franco and Mola, then faded to Madrid to show the populace there, with shots of Largo Caballero and his ministers. Another fade took the viewer back to the events of the Alcazar at Toledo, and the whole story concluded with an assemblage of Irun burning, a woman fleeing with her belongings, mothers and babies, and a final shot of dead bodies. All in all the Review of Spain amounted to a catalogue of Republican

88. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.1, No.11, February 1937, p.42.

89. BP Issue No.609, 28/12/36. "Review of the Year".

defeats, or so it appeared. The shortcomings inherent in Paramount's montage were the same ones that they had manifested throughout the year. They were more than capable of obtaining an impressive array of newsreel film, but they were not so good at knowing how to use it to best effect. The criticism levelled at them by film critics was typical for it noted that "Paramount has most of the stock faults, the formal dullness, a commentator who keeps going most of the time, with most of the facts, at most of the speed of which he is capable, a half-hearted use of natural sound."⁹⁰

As the World Film News critic went on to say "The Annual Review is the year's best test of the production ability of a newsreel...the Production Departments have months for planning, weeks for cutting and re-recording, days for commenting and final publishing." After assessing the material for all five major newsreel companies he came to the conclusion that "the 1936 batch of Reviews leads to no new conclusions, instead piles up further proof of a fact that through this year, has become more and more widely accepted, that in production Gaumont British News looks down upon its competitors from a mountain top." The reason for this production success stemmed simply from the fact that at Gaumont the entire-make-up of the reel, at the

90. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.1, No.11, February 1937, p.42.

cutting, commentating, and re-recording stages was under the control of its commentator and this co-ordination under Ted Emmett brought a unity to the newsreel that was noticeably lacking in its competitors' product. World Film News put the points of difference succinctly when they said: "The old system, as it still hobbles along today, implies that the editor should first completely cut each story silent, like a slice of dry bread, then hand the job on to the sound man, who spreads the butter, then leave it to the commentator to add the jam." Such a system of production was employed at Paramount which explains why they were never able to capitalise upon their worthwhile and sometimes unusual newsreel film of the Spanish Civil War. At Gaumont, as had been shown in 1936, Emmett dictated the editorial line completely. However if Gaumont British and British Paramount were at odds on achieving the best methods of newsreel production, at least they were in complete agreement on what they were to say in their respective newsreels. Throughout the latter half of 1936 the message they put forward on Spain was that Civil War in that country was tearing down the foundations of private and social life. By comparison Britain was stable and gaining in prosperity and every effort must be made to ensure it continued to do so by remaining at peace and by not getting involved in the affray.

Chapter 7The Course of the War

In November, 1936, Tom Cummings the editor-in-chief at British Paramount News could justifiably claim that "our men are attached to the military commanders of both the Government and Insurgent forces, the better to secure a complete picture of the present conflict in Spain."¹ Yet during the opening months of 1937 it is obvious that the amount of film expended on Spain decreases by comparison with the extensive coverage in the first six months of the War, so much so that by June it was noticeable that "for most reels Spain is now in the oblivion class, with cameramen recalled."² The actual campaigns in the War were little covered, in all probability because the events they depicted were fast becoming predictable and repetitive. There was constant reference to the fact that "still the sorry story of war drags on"³ and to "this long drawn-out story of fratricide".⁴ Gaumont in particular paid scant attention to the hostilities, simply noting that "The war in Spain drags on"⁵ or that "attack and defence pursue

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1. G.T. Cummings, "A Reply to Sketch Editor's Criticisms", World Film News, Vol.1. No.8, November 1936, p.39.
 2. The Commentator, "Newsreel Rushes", World Film News, Vol.2. No.3, June 1937, p.30.
 3. GB Issue No.318, 14/1/37. "Madrid buildings in ruins".
 4. GB Issue No.322, 28/1/37. "Malaga and Madrid".
 5. GB Issue No.328, 18/2/37. "Spanish Civil War drags on".

their dogged course...day after day in this interminable war."⁶ But if the Civil War itself was relegated to oblivion, Spain as a point of reference for the rest of Europe became increasingly more important.

The newsreel depiction of the Spanish protagonists was very quickly settled at the outset of the year and reinforced later. A Paramount release for January 11⁷ slipped in a short piece set in Santiago where "The Historic Spanish City inaugurates a Holy Year". Santiago de Compostella in Galicia had always been a place of worship for Christian pilgrims wishing to visit the shrine of St. James and this report of a "Carlist Religious Ceremony" in the city simply showed how a sense of normality was returning, at least to that part of Spain held by the Nationalists. The story highlights the inauguration with the Archbishop approaching the door of the city's cathedral and knocking down a wall which had been ceremonially bricked up for the occasion. It is ironic that this particular Archbishop was chosen since later he proved himself to be something of a dissident cleric in Franco's Spain by retorting to a vengeful Falangist speech that "There have been enough crimes."⁸ However the image of a religiously

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- 6. GB Issue No.332, 4/3/37. "Defence of Madrid still holds out".
 - 7. BP Issue No.613, 11/1/37. "News Flashes from Everywhere, Santiago".
 - 8. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.358.

devout Nationalist Spain was taken up and used again by Paramount on April 1⁹ when they commented upon the celebration of a "Holy Week in Seville" and added that "Under Franco, the populace revert to the splendour of old times". By contrast the Republican populace was shown to be in a desperate state. Occasionally there was room to show that "in their spare time the defending troops amuse themselves with fireworks"¹⁰ but the ever-present image of Republican Spain noted that they were "pursuing their normal course, a course of grim reality divorced from any kind of gaiety."¹¹ As far as the newsreels were concerned the Republic was hard-pressed and in dire extremes.

If the internal situation failed to engage the attention of the British newsreels, the same could not be said of the international implications of Spain's Civil War during this period. On this front the year began, as far as both Gaumont and Paramount were concerned, with stories in their respective issues for January 7 regarding the Anglo-Italian Mediterranean Pact. Paramount showed film of Sir Eric Drummond, the British Ambassador, and Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, meeting in Rome and actually

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9. BP Issue No.636, 1/4/37. "Spain keeps Holy Week despite War".
 10. GB Issue No.318.
 11. GB Issue No.354, 20/5/37. "Basque children evacuated from Bilbao".

signing the Pact.¹² Gaumont did the same and went on to add that "By this Pact Italy assures Britain that she has no intentions of flirting with Franco for islands in the Mediterranean which are of importance to Britain."¹³ This agreement did achieve some success in drawing Britain and Italy to the conference table, a necessary act in view of the fact that, in the previous November, Count Ciano had proposed to Franco that Italy would continue to send aid, if he in turn supported Italy with her Mediterranean policy. But the Anglo-Italian Pact signed on January 2, 1937, proved to be no more than "a gentleman's agreement" for the detailed negotiations, which it was expected would follow, did not materialise until 1938. Each party went about officially "assuring the other that it did not intend to change the status quo in the Mediterranean"¹⁴ but the guaranteed freedom of passage through the Mediterranean suffered a severe setback later in the year when Italian submarines began to hit at neutral shipping.

In the prevailing climate of appeasement of Mussolini, at the beginning of the year, Emmett thought better than to include the word "dishonourable" before "intentions of flirting with Franco" in his report, as an earlier draft of his script had intended. Furthermore

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- 12. BP Issue No.612, 7/1/37. "News Flashes from everywhere; Rome".
 - 13. GB Issue No.316, 7/1/37. "Anglo-Italian Pact".
 - 14. Taylor, Origins, p.163.

Emmett showed great foresight, albeit unwittingly, in not including in his final script a sentence which he had drafted and which read "It is an international burying of the hatchet laid bare by Abyssinia".¹⁵

During the months of January and February, Gaumont released only three stories directly referring to the Civil War but what is perhaps most interesting in these reports is the subtle change in the points of contract between Spain and Great Britain. The first report¹⁶ on Madrid in ruins went through the now customary array of "Shattered buildings, railway stations wrecked beyond recognition and evacuation of women and children." Yet at the same time this piece does offer one important innovation for it was preceded by a short story entitled "Gas Masks" which stated that: "Production has already begun in the new Government respirator factory in Blackburn and soon they will be turning them out at the rate of half a million a week. Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, Under Secretary for Home Affairs, opening the factory, said that in the event of war gas masks would be issued free by the Government." As it turned out it was not until September, 1938, during the Czech Crisis, that thirty-eight million gas masks were distributed to regional centres throughout Britain, at a

15. Typewritten script to GB Issue No.316, "Anglo-Italian Pact", together with handwritten amendments to same for final commentary.

16. GB Issue No.318.

time when preparations were made for what was felt to be an impending war. But this story in a newsreel for January, 1937, shows quite forcefully that, in the minds of the British Government at least, there was "apprehension at the renewed possibility of general war,"¹⁷ resulting from the conflict in Spain. In fact Emmett's script almost went so far as to explicitly tie the Gas Masks and Madrid stories together. The first draft of his Spanish story began originally with a linking sentence which read "In Madrid, the real need for defence against air attack is only too pitifully apparent." It can be no accident that he removed these words. All too often in the past Emmett had chosen to juxtapose stories, in order to suggest a connection or enforce a point. Carrying over an idea from a story on Britain manufacturing gas masks, in case of war, to a story on Madrid already experiencing the rigours of air attack, must have appeared to him to be suggestive enough without the explicit link-up. After all "Fear of gas attack from the air was an acute element in the apprehension before 1939".¹⁸ So Emmett toned down the connection and left the audience to draw the conclusion for itself. A somewhat similar excision was made in Gaumont's next story on Spain.¹⁹ This again spotlighted Madrid under attack and the concluding

17. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.336.

18. Taylor, English History, p.427.

19. Typewritten script to GB Issue No.322, "Malaga and Madrid", together with handwritten amendments to same for final commentary.

sentence to the item was to have read: "Overhead droning planes startle the anti-aircraft units into action."

This too was cut. The reason for its deletion becomes all too apparent from the succeeding story which concerned the visit of the French Minister of Marine to Northern Africa in order to inspect the French fleet at Algiers. For this piece went on to mention that the French Atlantic squadron was on manoeuvres, which "included anti-aircraft and big gun practice." Emmett must have considered that to highlight anti-aircraft activities in Madrid, in one story, then to follow it with film of France, Britain's close ally, practising similar activities, could be to suggest too strong a connection. Hence the excision.

It is noticeable that within six months of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the points of comparison between Britain and Spain had changed considerably. At the outset the contrast was between a Spain caught up in the turmoil of Civil War and a stable Britain, at peace. Now Britain is plainly seen to be engaging in preparation for war, an unspecified war as yet, but the fear is evident none the less. There has been a change in the newsreel content which accurately reflects the position that Spain had come to occupy in international affairs. Indeed the situation had altered within a shorter time than six months for Paramount's story of November, 1936, entitled "Where Stands Peace?" had shown European nations re-arming but had not mentioned Britain as one of their number. Now, in Gaumont's

next issue for February 18, 1937,²⁰ there was a story going into precisely that topic.

Gaumont's issue 328 had a penultimate story on the Fall of Malaga. Malaga fell to the Nationalists under the command of the Duke of Seville on February 8 and there then followed a wholesale slaughter of Republican sympathisers. Gaumont reacted in the same way that Pathe had responded over the massacres at Badajoz, by not showing them for fear of offending the audience. As the commentary put it: "Many scenes of dead and wounded we have omitted because they are too horrible. These of a ruined beauty spot and holiday resort, these are more than enough." This report on Spain was immediately followed by "Britain re-arms", the final story to the issue, in a commanding slot, and some 219 feet in length, the longest story in the whole release.

The item begins in something of an apologetic tone stating that "Parliament has decided that Britain shall spend one thousand five hundred millions on arms in the next five years. Not directed against any one country, said the Chancellor, but because of our vast responsibilities in all parts of the world, and as a measure for the preservation of peace." The situation has changed somewhat from Gaumont's story of the previous August on "Wonderful Britain", where Britain was seen to be serving her best interests by

20. GB Issue No.328.

concentrating on her industrial growth and remaining aloof from what the rest of Europe was doing. Now Britain is seen to be drawn into the European fray and is compelled to prepare herself for all contingencies. But the emphasis is still very much on Britain's desire to preserve the peace.

The opening apologia very quickly gives way to the domestic implications for this country of her international commitments. The commentary continues: "This means no remission in taxation but it gives security. Even more than that, it will reduce the figures of unemployment." The introduction into the story of a potential palliative in the form of increased employment is elaborated further as Emmett adds that "More ships mean more men at work, building, supplying them with every class of material needed on a modern man of war." The proportions of the commitment to re-arm are then spelt out as he notes "In addition to three new battleships, Britain will have seven new cruisers. There will be two more aircraft-carriers and that will mean an increase in personnel for Britain's manpower is still far below that of many other nations."

The rest of Emmett's narrative continues in the same vein:

The Navy's Air Arm will be developed. We already have the Queen Bee, the bombing plane that flies without a pilot. Increases here mean more men at work, aircraft factories will be going at full pressure and security will bring prosperity. Operational and training centres will be extended for the Royal Air Force, at Speke near Liverpool they have already begun work on the site for a new

aircraft factory. This again means more work, more wages for more men. Home and Empire coastal defences will be strengthened and modernised, and the accumulation of essential supplies like oil will be given storage in protected areas. Mechanization of the Army will go forward at record speed, motor car factories will work full pressure, more men at work, more employment. Territorials will be equipped with Regular Army weapons and this will bring much-needed work to many factories. Every aeroplane, every tank means more work and more safety. Even if it means an increase in taxation, what a great insurance.

Emmett's script concludes on a typically patriotic note by adding: "It is a life policy. Even if it does mean an increase it also means security, more employment, and the preservation of peace for this great country of ours, this British Empire." The message was simple and straightforward: Britain still wanted to preserve peace, but in order to do so, she should now re-arm in order to remain secure. Spain was not admitted to be the main cause of this thinking, but it was certainly seen to be a motivating factor.

A.J.P. Taylor has concluded that "There were four clear steps in the advance of British armament"²¹ from the period after the 1935 general election to the advent of the Second World War. The Gaumont story on "Britain Re-arms" would appear to act very much as a prelude to what Taylor considers to be the second of those steps for "Neville Chamberlain, in his last budget (April 1937) abandoned

21. Taylor, English History, p.412.

peacetime finance, and devised a special tax, the National Defence Contribution...He also laid down that £400 million of the extra cost should be met by borrowing, spread over five years."²²

During the opening months of 1937, Paramount were also extending their horizons beyond the immediate environs of Spain, only they found their answer further afield. Their issue for January 21²³ contained a story under the title "U.S. Ban too late to catch Spanish cargo." The story begins in New York and shows a ship being loaded with arms for Spain. The newsreel cameraman follows the ship as it leaves port then aerial shots take up the story as it heads out for sea, pursued by a coastguard which eventually turns away as it reaches the three-mile limit. The incident depicted is that of the events surrounding the sailing of the Mar Cantabrico, which on December 28, 1936, had been licensed to ship aircraft engines to the Spanish Government by Robert Cuse, acting for the Comintern. The United States Government then proceeded to hurry through Congress an Embargo Act in order to prevent such shipments but it was not passed until January 8 and the Mar Cantabrico had left on January 7.

From this point on Paramount finally took up the matter of Non-Intervention. It is ironic that at the time

22. Ibid.

23. BP Issue No.616, 21/1/37. "U.S. Ban too late to catch Spanish cargo".

when Gaumont's reports were seeming to indicate that Britain was becoming more and more embroiled in the international repercussions of the War in Spain, Paramount started covering the attempts at reconciliation through the Non-Intervention Committee. On January 20 Germany and Italy agreed to support an Anglo-French plan to prevent volunteers entering Spain. This proposal had been put forward at the Non-Intervention Committee on December 4, and reiterated in a Franco-British note on January 10. A Control Plan was agreed upon whereby there would be observers on the non-Spanish side of Spain's frontiers, as well as patrols of Spanish waters by non-intervention warships. In fact the final scheme was not approved by all parties until March 8 and for all that Russia, Germany and Italy still managed to supply their respective allies in Spain with military aid. But Paramount's reports only showed the apparent fruits of the Non-Intervention Committee's labours. Their issue 618²⁴ noted that "Germany, Italy and Russia agree, with France and Britain, to ban intervention." Issue 625²⁵ had a story from Nice which showed the French Mediterranean Fleet at battle practice as "the Powers put Non-Intervention in Spain into force" and their next release, issue 626,²⁶ proudly announced

24. BP Issue No.618, 28/1/37. "Madrid raided as Powers ban intervention".

25. BP Issue No.625, 22/2/37. "French Navy stage battle off Riviera".

26. BP Issue No.626, 25/2/37. "Six Power Ban on Spanish Intervention".

that "The Non-Intervention Committee appoint 1,000 inspectors as a cordon around Spain to stop arms and volunteers." This final story showed film of the Spanish-French frontier at Hendaye with Gendarmes examining lorries and people as they crossed over the frontier into Spain. Clearly the first success achieved by the Non-Intervention Committee at securing a Control Plan was considered to be important by Paramount, important enough to break a long-held silence on the Committee's activities. Yet even this achievement was still being flouted in practice.

Such events did at least present an alternative to the interminable siege of Madrid. With the exception of reports by both Gaumont and Paramount on March 4, the siege of Madrid virtually died as a source of potential interest. Even the stories for March 4 preferred to spend most of their time, after passing reference to the beleaguered city, by concentrating upon a British liner, the Landoverly Castle, which struck a mine off the coast of Spain but still managed to limp into the French harbour of Port Vendres.²⁷ After that Paramount went to great lengths to seek stories on something else, even, it appears, to reporting stories that were manifestly incorrect. Issue 629,²⁸ for example, shows Franco greeting General Von Faupel,

27. BP Issue No.628, 4/3/37. "British Liner Mined";
GB Issue No.332, 4/3/37. "Defence of Madrid still holds on".

28. BP Issue No.629, 8/3/37. "Franco greets Hitler's Envoy".

the newly appointed German Ambassador, at Salamanca. Von Faupel is wearing evening dress and, according to the title, is seen to be "presenting his credentials" to General Franco. The film might indeed be of the two men together at Salamanca but could not possibly be of their initial meeting, since Von Faupel had presented his credentials to Franco some time earlier at Burgos, where he had chosen to dress in the cap and gown of a university professor. Similarly in issue 630,²⁹ there is a short report of a ship bearing arms for Spain being intercepted off the coast of New York. In fact the story was fabricated entirely from film of an earlier incident when the Mar Cantabrico actually escaped the American Embargo. Paramount were intent upon showing that Non-Intervention was working for at this point in time they also prepared two stories, which showed the extent of foreign intervention in Spain, but in the final outcome they chose not to release them for exhibition. The first one contained numerous shots of the Thaelmann Battallion of the International Brigade³⁰ and the second showed volunteers for Spain.³¹

Gaumont were obviously going through their own crisis about what should and should not be shown on Spain. For

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- 29. BP Issue No.630, 11/3/37. "News Flashes From Everywhere, New York".
 - 30. BP Library No.5946. "International Brigades". (Not Issued.)
 - 31. BP Library No.5990. "Volunteers for Spain". (Not Issued.)

they too prepared a report for release in issue 338 which showed British prisoners of war in Spain. The story was cut from that release but was used in the next issue 339³² after some excisions had been made. Emmett's new script went to great pains to omit his previous mention that the British volunteers had been working for the Spanish Government "at wages of £5 a week". He circled the phrase and scored it with the word "out". Obviously it might have made it appear to be too attractive a proposition. Furthermore in its new context the British prisoners of war story was suitably played down by putting it alongside "an interview from the Spanish trenches". The commentary then ran:

Mr. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, is again discussing the question of Non-Intervention in Spain, and our news pictures this week from the land of civil war include these of British prisoners. Some of the army of unemployed enrolled for road-making under the Spanish Government, but they were captured by the Insurgents. Here they are in a detention camp, being served out with food, of which there is no scarcity. In the fighting line our cameraman is on the spot, securing the first sound-film interview from the trenches. And then the deluge. Taking some of his pictures from a ruined building and some from an armoured car, our cameraman secured this grim record of an

32. Typewritten scripts to GB Issue No.338 and to GB Issue No.339, 29/3/37, "British Prisoners of War in Spain", together with handwritten amendments to same.

attack on the village.

The story is notable for several reasons. First of all it acknowledges the existence of Non-Intervention, although it does so in a matter of fact way, as though it had been in existence all the time, as indeed it had. Nevertheless this was the first time that Gaumont had mentioned "Non-Intervention". Secondly, it suggests that the men who went from Britain to fight in Spain were unemployed.³³ No doubt a certain number of British volunteers were unemployed but idealism and ideological commitment must surely have been a stronger motive in most instances. There is no mention made of such reasons. Thirdly, this report suggests that they went to Spain to make roads, when there can be little doubt that as members of the International Brigade they contributed most of all to the fighting. Fourthly, the story goes out of its way to show how well they were looked after in detention by Franco, at the same time making it obvious that the Nationalist forces were amply supplied with food. In conclusion it should be noted that only 48 feet of film were expanded on the prisoners of war section, whereas 66 feet of film were used on the succeeding piece

33. In fact Taylor, English History, p.396, also agrees that; "Of the 2,000 odd British citizens who fought for the Spanish Republic, the great majority were workers, particularly unemployed miners." However Emmett's use of the phrase "The army of unemployed" implies that these men went to fight in Spain simply to escape British unemployment. Few would disagree that ideological commitment was at least as strong a motive.

which supposedly heralded the technological advance of a first live interview from the Spanish trenches. All that the interviewer does with this new advance is to mention his location and add that a battle is going on for the adjoining territory. Gaumont were still manifesting their capacity for bias and selectivity when it came to reporting on the British contingent of the International Brigade. This was made all the more evident with a further report on British prisoners in Spain which was released on June 3.³⁴ For this one Emmett really loaded his terminology by commenting that the British prisoners looked "strangely criminal with their cropped hair." Again there was an insistence that "these men were unemployed" and that "they went to Spain to work on roadmaking and other such occupations." There is also film of them in a detention camp being given "food and a few cigarettes". For the first time at least they were afforded their proper title as Emmett adds, "They became part of the International Brigade under the Spanish Government", though he was careful not to mention that they were actually "fighting", which his first draft had intended. Presumably it would have undermined his point that they were given menial jobs to do.

Meanwhile on March 22 Franco had outlined a new plan of campaign to set General Mola and his Army of the North against the Basques in an attempt to mop up the North of

34. GB Issue No.358, 3/6/37. "British Prisoners in Spain".

Spain. Mola's army was reorganised and his offensive began on March 31. Considering how little coverage there was of the actual fighting in Spain at this time, it is unlikely that the War in the North would have received any mention were it not for two factors: the bombing of Guernica and the plight of the Basque refugees, in particular the children.

Guernica was bombed on April 26 and it immediately caused an international outcry. Gaumont released film of the bombed out city in their issue of May 6³⁵ in a brilliantly edited story, the commentary for which ran:

First pictures from the Basque Republic of the Holy City of Guernica, scene of the most terrible air raid **our** modern history yet can boast. Hundreds were killed here, men women and children. Four thousand bombs were dropped out of a blue sky into a hell that raged unchecked for five murderous hours. This was a city and these were homes, like yours

In fact Emmett's figures greatly underestimate the casualty toll which amounted to 1,654 dead, as well as getting the length of the air-raid wrong for it lasted three hours.³⁶ But for all that his short report, only 53 feet of film, still successfully conveyed the general air of horror and repulsion felt by many people at this event. His concluding sentence, "This was a city and these were homes like yours", brings forcibly home to a British audience the full implications of aerial bombing. But what is

35. GB Issue No.350, 6/6/37. "Ruins of Guernica".

36. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.419.

perhaps most interesting about Gaumont's report on Guernica is the fact that it acknowledged the aerial bombing at all. After all Guernica had been bombed on April 26, and Gaumont's report did not appear until May 6. In the intervening period there had been a welter of press reports putting forward conflicting evidence about what had caused the town's destruction. The Times, for instance, maintained that Guernica had been bombed by aeroplanes. Indeed it went further than that, for on April 28:

The Times published, as an editorial page article, a report from its Special Correspondent (G.L. Steer) which stated that the planes were part of the Luftwaffe squadrons which were fighting for the Nationalists. The article was accompanied by a strongly worded leader.³⁷

Other correspondents who subscribed to the same opinion were Noel Monks of the Daily Express, Christopher Holme of Reuters, and Mathieu Corman, who wrote for Ce Soir of Paris.³⁸ All four of them had been in Guernica itself at some point during the day of April 26. But certain other correspondents had not arrived in Guernica until April 29, after it had fallen to the Nationalists. These journalists included James Holburn, also of The Times, W.P. Carney of

37. Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-1939, p.113.

38. Hugh Thomas, "Heinkels over Guernica", Times Literary Supplement, April 11, 1975, p.392.

the New York Times, Georges Botto of the French Havas agency, Max Mossot of the Paris Journal, Pierre Hericourt of Action Francaise, and Richard Massock of the Associated Press. And:

They were told by the Nationalist press department that Guernica had been either entirely or wholly destroyed by the retreating Basques.³⁹

In view of the conflicting reports, Gaumont might well have been expected to accept the opinion that Guernica had been destroyed by retreating Basque incendiarys. After all Irun had been destroyed in a similar manner and then Gaumont had made great play out of the needless destruction, comparing it to San Sebastian which had been captured relatively intact. Yet in this instance they chose to accept that Guernica had been bombed and they emphasised the destructive capacity of aerial bombing. However, it should be added, that they also chose to join the ranks of "the various British papers" in which "responsibility for the attack was never definitely known or apportioned".⁴⁰ Although Gaumont saw Guernica as an undoubted outrage, they never went so far as The Times in accusing German planes of the bombing. Indeed they never even explicitly accused the Nationalists of engaging any German planes to fight on their behalf. Over Guernica, Gaumont seem to have chosen to follow

39. Ibid.

40. Gannon, The British Press and Germany, p.115.

a path midway between the neutral reporting of The Times and the avowedly partisan reporting of such papers as the Morning Post, Daily Mail, Daily Sketch and Observer, which supported the Nationalists.

In commenting on Guernica, C.L. Mowat has suggested:

Such events, and the reports on them, produced a crisis of opinion in Great Britain; it is this which gives the Spanish Civil War its tremendous importance in British history in the late thirties. It widened existing divisions, between government and opposition, between right and left (terms hardly used in the political sense in England before this)... Division of opinion over the war in newspapers and pamphlets reflected and enlarged the wider cleavage. It led to a changing of sides over peace and war... Non-intervention and pacifism crossed over from the opposition to the government: "no war" became the slogan, not of the left, but of the right.⁴¹

Certainly there was little evidence of a "crisis of opinion" or a "division of opinion" reflected in the newsreels. On the whole they reflected a consensus of opinion, a consensus of pro-government opinion. They had always supported the government's call for "no war", for instance. Yet the bombing of Guernica, in particular, does seem to have evoked a change of emphasis in the newsreel response to the Spanish Civil War. The bombing of Guernica sparked off a whole series of reports in Gaumont newsreels, for example, throughout the rest of the year, which put more weight on aerial power and warfare. And it was reports like these

41. Charles Loch Mowat, Britain Between The Wars 1918-1940, London 1966, pp.577-578.

which explain the greatly exaggerated fear of bombing among people in this country during the period from September, 1938, to the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴² Before Guernica there had been but one report, during 1937, on such matters, and that had been a somewhat innocuous mention of the Italian Air Force celebrating its anniversary with a review, by King Victor Emmanuel II, of ten thousand pilots.⁴³ After Guernica such reports proliferated and took on ominous overtones. Gaumont's issue 363⁴⁴ showed that "Flying over Henlow, our cameraman with the Royal Air Force secured pictures of parachute training" and went on to reveal "The most spectacular of all air exercises, a mass formation of flight. Two hundred and fifty planes darkened the sky and the roar of engines set the earth athrob. It was the biggest mass flight ever attempted." Paramount's issue 674⁴⁵ also centred on Britain and showed how "398 Planes test London's Air Defence Plan" in a story noting that the mock raiders were foiled and that London's Air Defence Plan "claims 80% success". Shortly afterwards Gaumont highlighted Air Ministry and War Office representatives at a mock air-raid during the rush hour in Berlin. "At

42. See Taylor, English History, p.437, note A, where he states that "All the emphasis was laid on Guernica" in miscalculating the potential effects of German bombing on London.

43. GB Issue No.342, 8/4/37. "Italian Air Force on parade".

44. GB Issue No.363, 21/6/37. "Parachutes and fly past".

45. BP Issue No.674, 12/8/37. "398 Planes test London's Air Defence Plan".

the first warning", the story ran, "houses, offices, shops, buses, cars and trams were all deserted for bomb and gas-proof shelters." It concluded by stating: "Overhead, squadron after squadron of bombers darkened the sky, playing a duet of death with defending anti-aircraft guns. This is peacetime make-believe, in war it would be worse than this." The same issue⁴⁶ complimented Germany's show of strength by observing Hore Belisha, the British War Minister, as a representative at some French Army manoeuvres. But the film of aerial power continued right through into the following year with such pieces as "Russian Air Display",⁴⁷ which spotlighted a mass parachute descent, near Moscow, presided over by Stalin, and with "Planes by the hundred and men by the score of hundred, swarming on wings like an army of locusts...And when the descent is accomplished the sky is darkened once again with rank after rank of bombers." Clearly, as far as the newsreels were concerned, aerial warfare was a power to be reckoned with.

Yet if the bombing of Guernica was seen to have profound long-term implications for the rest of Europe, then it was a more immediate concern for the lot of the Basque children which expressed itself most in May 1937. France and Russia agreed to take numbers of evacuated Basque children, as did Britain where a Basque Children's Relief

46. GB Issue No.390, 23/9/37. "Berlin Air Raid; French Manoeuvres".

47. GB Issue No.419, 3/1/38. "Russian Air Display".

Committee was set up for the purpose of receiving 4,000 of their numbers. As with the bombing of Guernica, humanitarian instincts seem to have overridden most other considerations as far as the newsreels were concerned. The matter of the Basque children really gave the newsreels a cause to follow and they joined the ranks of "mobilised public opinion", among those "several ad hoc bodies which were, in effect, 'popular fronts' drawing in members of all parties".⁴⁸

Gaumont and Paramount ran stories in their releases for May 20. Paramount's report entitled "6,000 children evacuated from stricken Bilbao" showed the S.S. Habana arriving off La Rochelle in France under the caption "The humane work of the Great Powers saves kiddies from the horrors of siege and war."⁴⁹ Gaumont noted that "Hundreds of children have been evacuated from the danger zone at Bilbao, the city of bombardment and air raids". They dismissed the rest of the War by saying: "As the long Civil War drags interminably on, the one factor that emerges triumphant is the dogged endurance of this nation divided against itself, each side fighting for what it believes to be right".⁵⁰ The attraction for the newsreels of this

48. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, pp.578-579.

49. BP Issue No.650, 20/5/37. "6,000 children evacuated from the stricken Bilbao".

50. GB Issue No.354, 20/5/37. "Basque children evacuated from Bilbao".

story was that they could follow through the journey of the contingent of children destined to live in England. On May 27 once again both companies had follow-up pieces on the arrival of the children in this country. Gaumont recounted: "Everything is being done for their care and comfort but nothing can replace what they have lost. This is the price of war, paid by those who should know nothing of its horrors. The heart bleeds for these children. It is a grim reflection on our own civilisation."⁵¹ The Paramount cameras were also at Southampton to see the Habana dock and they chose to have cameramen go with the children on the final part of their journey to a camp at Stoneham in Lincolnshire where they were to be boarded.⁵²

The campaign to take the city of Bilbao was one of the few campaigns to receive any attention. Gaumont did two reports, the first of which "The Basque Iron Belt falls"⁵³ acted simply as a prelude to the more extensive "Bilbao Falls"⁵⁴ which covered the capture of the city on June 19. Both stories were relatively short and occupied unimportant slots in their respective releases. The paucity of newsreel cameramen still covering the fighting is admirably demonstrated by Paramount's story for though

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- 51. GB Issue No.356, 27/5/37. "Basque children arrive in England".
 - 52. BP Issue No.652, 27/5/37. "Basque children arrive in England".
 - 53. GB Issue No.363, 21/6/37. "Basque Iron Belt falls".
 - 54. GB Issue No.364, 26/6/37. "Bilbao Falls".

they did a News Special on the Fall of Bilbao, devoting some 290 feet of film to the event, in fact most of it was drawn from material they already held in their stock-shot library.⁵⁵ There was a small amount of first-hand footage of the hostilities, but they also drew upon stock-shot film from no less than eight previous stories to fill it out.

Events that were taking place at sea off the coast of Spain very quickly turned the newsreels away from the land campaign, for which they were undoubtedly more than grateful. For at the time when Britain had agreed to take the Basque children, the British Government had decided to join the French in escorting refugee ships once they were outside Spanish territorial waters. In fact the Basque children had been the first to benefit from such protection. Luckily for Gaumont they had chosen to send one of their cameramen aboard one such ship when it had been stopped by an Insurgent warship and ultimately saved by the British navy. The result was a highly dramatic and engrossing piece of reportage which ran:⁵⁶

The Gaumont British News cameraman at Santander secured these amazing pictures of the flight of refugees to the security of France. Their only thought is escape, some are blind, some are cripples, most are old women and children. Before

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- 55. BP Issue No.660, 24/6/37. "Bilbao Falls".
 - 56. GB Issue No.368, 8/7/37. "Drama on the High Seas off Santander".

they leave they are searched carefully for food or valuables, for neither of these must be taken out of the country. The ship that takes them is a French ship, the Tregastel, which has had several adventures off the coast of Spain. Their living conditions on board cannot but be wretched but at least they think they are safe.

Out of the silence comes the crash of gunfire as a warning shot across the bows announces the arrival of the Insurgent warship Almirante Cervera. Signals are exchanged and the refugee ship stops. But the British patrol ship, H.91---H.M.S. Bulldog, appeared on the scene with the French ship Vauquois, to preserve the freedom of the high seas. The Tregastel is allowed to proceed as the Almirante Cervera makes off. The merchant ship on the left of this picture is the Kellwyn, skippered by the famous Potato Jones.

And so these luckless people continue their voyage but long months of hardship and malnutrition have told their tale. The signal is run up for a doctor and the Vauquois sends one across in a small boat. And so their journey ended with a safe landing at Pauillac. From the welter of war on sea and land they came safely to France.

Gaumont British had an extraordinary piece of luck in securing this story. They could not have done better if they had wanted to make a feature film. It had all the ingredients for success; an exciting scenario running the gamut of emotions from relief at escaping from Spain, to fear and trepidation at the prospect of being thwarted and captured, to elation at being saved and arriving at a haven of peace; finally it had a complete dramatis personae, the best known cruiser the Nationalist fleet could offer in the Almirante Cervera, a British ship appropriately called called H.M.S. Bulldog and Potato Jones, renowned in Britain

for his blockade breaking exploits, thrown in for good measure, though quite what he was doing there is never explained. Furthermore the story was able to highlight an instance when the British visibly maintained the stance they were taking in the Spanish Civil War, namely the desire to preserve the peace, whilst at the same time protecting the innocent.

Britain's desire "to preserve the freedom of the high seas" was, however, shortly to receive a severe setback. For in late July Italian fears at the supposed extent of Soviet aid still reaching the Republic caused Mussolini to consider starting a submarine campaign against such shipping. The trouble was that the Russian aid was being transported to Spain under the flags of many neutral countries. However that did not deter Mussolini's submarines from attacking vessels of all countries, Britain and France included, and the submarine campaign increased in intensity throughout August. Mussolini also decided to throw Italian aircraft into the campaign, flying out from their base in Majorca.

Paramount's release for August 5⁵⁷ contained a short story set near Marseilles of a "Spanish ship shelled by two unidentified submarines". Once again it is strange that the newsreels had difficulty establishing the identity of these "unidentified" submarines for in order to shell the Spanish merchantman the Italian submarines would have been compelled

57. BP Issue No.672, 5/8/37. "News Flashes From Everywhere. Near Marseilles".

to surface. And Mussolini had given orders that his submarines "would raise a Spanish flag if they had to surface", so at the very least one might have expected them to be thought to be Spanish Nationalist submarines. Another Paramount report on September 6⁵⁸ showed two damaged ships which had managed to reach Falmouth harbour. One was the Spanish Government destroyer, the Jose Luis Diez, and the other was a British merchantman, the Hilda Moller. Both ships had actually been hit during the course of an air-raid on Gijon but this story also went on to recount that "the Cabinet decides to take action" on the attacks on British shipping generally.

The British Government had indeed decided to take action and the outcome was a Conference called at Nyon on September 10. On the very first day of the Nyon Anti-Piracy Conference Britain and France agreed to send fleets to patrol the Mediterranean with the intention of attacking suspicious submarines. An agreement was signed to that effect on September 14. Paramount's newsreel for September 16 covered the arrival of the delegates at the Conference and singled out Eden, Delbos and Litvinov for recognition.⁵⁹ It also mentioned that "the Nyon Anti-Piracy Conference plans Mediterranean patrols." By the time of their next

58. BP Issue No.681, 6/9/37. "Ships bombed in Gijon air-raid reach Britain".

59. BP Issue No.684, 16/9/37. "Bombs enrage French as Piracy Conference Sits".

issue on September 20⁶⁰ they were able to release a story entitled "Piracy patrol starts before Nyon ink dries". It contained shots of the same three men signing the Agreement as well as shots of H.M.S. Cairo leaving Sheerness harbour to take up its duties in the Mediterranean.

Gaumont's report for September 20⁶¹ chose in a typical way, when they suddenly found themselves falling behind their competitors, to concertina the events that had lead up to the Nyon Conference, and its subsequent action, into one all-encompassing story. It began with shots of the Spanish Government destroyer off Falmouth only it added a new twist to the tale by commenting that "Sixty of the crew came ashore and refused to rejoin the ship, deserters from the war which is destroying Spain." Then it cut to a view of a British tanker, the Stanbridge, "hit during the same air-raid, a yawning hole in her side shows how near she came to ending her days in Spanish waters." In conclusion the story ended at Felixstowe where "Forty officers and men with 209 Squadron prepared to leave for Malta. Bad weather delayed them, but they left eventually to take up their duties with the Anti-Piracy Patrol. The Air Force co-operating with the Navy in the Mediterranean to safeguard merchantmen from attack by submarines. There is also danger in the war zone from bombs that fall promiscuously from the

60. BP Issue No.685, 20/9/37. "Piracy Patrol starts before Nyon ink dries".

61. GB Issue No.389, 20/9/37. "Spanish Destroyer".

aeroplanes of one side or another. To prevent misunderstanding, H.M.S. Warspite has adorned her decks with the red, white and blue of the Union Jack." Once more this Gaumont story, like Paramount's, had failed to make any mention of precisely who it was in the Mediterranean the British merchantmen had to fear. But then the British Government was still attempting to re-establish friendly relations with Mussolini and Italy, this became obvious from the fact that on September 18 the British and French gave the texts of the Nyon Agreement to Ciano in Rome and invited comments. "Unidentified submarines" and "bombs that fall promiscuously" were calculated to offend nobody. In one respect this story from Gaumont had made an advance for it described the Spanish Civil War as "a war which has imperilled the peace of Europe for more than a year." Such an opinion had been implicit in the newsreel coverage during 1937 but it had never been quite so openly acknowledged. But then from October onwards Gaumont, for one, began to recognise in their releases many an acknowledged fact, on Spain, which it had previously failed to bring to light.

On October 16, the Non-Intervention Committee met in London to discuss once again the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain. Surprisingly Gaumont and Paramount covered this meeting. This was the first time that either company had shown film of representatives gathering for a meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee, although the latter body

had been in existence for more than a year.

Paramount used their film as part of a story entitled "World Fences for Peace as Franco acts", released on October 18.⁶² They chose to spend most of the story, however, upon film which had been sent back to them of Franco holding a youth parade at Burgos under a title announcing that "Franco assures world that Spain will remain Spanish". This coverage is in itself very interesting for it continues Paramount's apparent campaign to "rehabilitate" Franco. For in covering the Burgos event the actual shots chosen by the editor to constitute the final release are those that isolate and romanticise the Spanish youth. The story picks out a series of shots of pretty Spanish girls and well-groomed males. There is also a shot enclosed of a Moor, on horseback, which looks decidedly posed in character. All the shots of Franco are taken from beneath him, as he stands on a dais, so that the viewer is always seen to be looking up at him. This piece occupies the fifth slot in a sequence of seven items and before it there is a report on Chamberlain. As the commentator puts it, "In his first talk since taking office Mr. Chamberlain outlines the ideas behind the National Fitness Campaign."

Gaumont used the very same stories in its issue

62. BP Issue No.693, 18/10/37. "World Fences for Peace as Franco Acts".

397⁶³ for the same date of October 18 but in a different way that once again reveals the immense gap in quality of production between these two newsreel companies. For Emmett chose to open his release with a Non-Intervention report, moved from there to Franco at Burgos, then proceeded to string together shots of Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler as a prelude to Chamberlain talking about the National Fitness Campaign. The purpose was to draw a comparison in speech making between the three dictators and the British Prime Minister. The commentary accompanying these shots ran:

Representatives of nine countries met at the Foreign Office to discuss the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain. Incidentally, at the same time, news had reached the League of Nations of a threatened war in Nicaragua. Luckily in that case there's no fear of intervention, because nobody knows where it is.

But on the question of Spain, a great step forward was achieved when Italy agreed through Count Grandi to a partial withdrawal of volunteers. And what of Spain itself? This year 35,000 people took part in the festivity of race, at Burgos. A review by General Franco, a study in light and shade, a grim reminder of how the youth of Spain marches in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

And here we present a comparison in speech-making. General Franco, Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler show a vivid contrast to Mr. Neville Chamberlain. Amid the European turmoil, our Premier speaks to you of the aims of British statesmen.

63. GB Issue No.397, 18/10/37. "Spanish Non-Intervention Committee meets in London".

The comments on the Non-Intervention Committee leave a lot to be desired. For the Committee only met on October 16 and agreement was not reached on the withdrawal of a "substantial proportion" of volunteers until November 4, and even then the agreement had to be put to the two Spanish parties concerned. Franco did not agree in principle to the plan until November 20 and the Republic on December 1. Yet here was Gaumont, on October 18, showing film of Committee members arriving for the meeting and at the same time proudly proclaiming that agreement had been reached with Count Grandi. But the way this story and the one on Franco at Burgos are used to build up to the final shots of Chamberlain is impressive. The Burgos parade floridly emphasises that the Spanish youth "marches in the Valley of the Shadow of Death". Then the film cuts to shots of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler, each one of whom is properly afforded his correct title, and each one of whom is depicted in a highly excited and animated manner, gesticulating furiously, and building up in speed from one dictator to the next. To cut, as the film does, from these shots to a shot of a thoroughly composed and carefully articulated Neville Chamberlain, gives the impression of moving from chaos to tranquility. This feeling is all the more enhanced by the fact that Chamberlain is situated in a classical context, as he stands before a marble fireplace in an imposing room. Furthermore unlike the dictators, Chamberlain delivers his speech in a humble tone, hardly moving, except

to raise his arms in an arc from his side to his well-known hands-on-lapels pose and then occasionally to point towards the camera. It was a brilliant piece of editing to juxtapose these shots of the European dictators with Chamberlain and the comparison is highly effective. Unfortunately Chamberlain was not speaking on anything more immediately pressing than the National Fitness Campaign but at least he is seen to be concerning himself with domestic matters and the speech itself is relatively unimportant for the main purpose, a contrast in style between the agitated dictators of Europe and the solid respectability of Britain's premier, is well conveyed.

The year ended for the Republicans as it had begun, with military defeats. Gijon fell to the Army of the North on October 21. Paramount and Gaumont noted the defeat in their issues for October 28. Paramount commented that "The last Government stronghold in Northern Spain falls to Franco"⁶⁴ while Gaumont made great play out of the fact that "Contrary to popular report there was practically no fighting before the Fall of Gijon. The streets are desolate and almost deserted. It was an Insurgent airman, making a forced landing in what he thought were the Government lines, who discovered that the troops had left. He passed the word through and the army of occupation began to march.

64. BP Issue No.696, 28/10/37. "News Flashes From Everywhere, Gijon".

Thus another town fell to General Franco."⁶⁵ To some extent their report was correct, the Republican leaders in the city fled to France on October 20 and twenty-two Republican battalions surrendered. When the Nationalist Colonel Aranda and General Solchaga entered the city in victory, Asturias had been completely lost to the Government.

That ended the newsreel coverage of Spain for 1937, as far as Paramount were concerned; they released no more stories on it for that year and Spain did not even merit a mention in their Review of the Year. Gaumont chose to follow up with another story on Gijon if only because it gave them another opportunity to portray Britain in her traditional newsreel role as a saviour. The story proved to be very much a minor version of what they had depicted in the previous "Drama on the High Seas off Santander". It ran:

When Insurgent troops captured Gijon they marched into a town that was deserted, an empty shell. The Government troops had fled and on this small trawler, the Maria Toro, 291 refugees sought the comparative safety of the sea. The British cruiser, Southampton, came upon the Maria Toro, and flung a line. These pictures, exclusive to Gaumont British News, give you one of the most dramatic rescues ever filmed. In the turbulent waters of the Bay of Biscay the cruiser took off the sorry human cargo of the Spanish trawler. Her engines had broken down; for five days the refugees had

65. GB Issue No.400, 28/10/37. "Spanish Insurgents Enter Gijon".

been without food. The work of getting aboard the Southampton was difficult and dangerous, as the seas flung the trawler against the steel of the cruiser's hull. The last man crashed over. Those who were injured were cared for. All were starving and they were given food. As they eat, their faces are a mixture of despair and relief. The trawler was set adrift. With useless engines, she would endanger shipping and she was sunk by the Southampton's gunfire before the refugees were taken ashore to safety in a land of peace.⁶⁶

Gaumont also went on to include Spain in its Review of the Year for 1937.⁶⁷ Only for the second time that year did they get to the point of openly admitting that "Throughout the year crisis after crisis hinged upon this Civil War" and what was more important was their acknowledgment that "Europe came near to being caught in the toils of this war". They then pointed out that "And Britain for the sake of safety decided to spend five hundred millions upon re-armament". To mention all three factors in the same breath was indeed an admission for Gaumont. But then 1937 had proved to be a year of admissions all round for Gaumont British. They had acknowledged the existence of the Non-Intervention Committee, albeit a year too late. They had acknowledged that there were British people fighting in Spain, indeed they had even mentioned that they formed part

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66. GB Issue No.401, 1/11/37. "Gijon refugees picked up by H.M.S. Southampton".
67. GB Issue No.417, 26/12/37. "Review of the Year, Foreign Affairs".

of the International Brigade. Yet they had still not admitted that there were also Germans, Italians and Russians fighting in Spain. And now, in their Review of the Year, they finally acknowledged what they had hinted at all along, namely that the Spanish Civil War had imperilled the peace of Europe as a whole and that as a direct consequence Britain had been compelled to re-arm.

Bitter fighting around Teruel heralded the advance of 1938. On December 15 the Republic had launched an attack on the town which was defended by a Nationalist garrison under its commander, Colonel Rey D'Harcourt. Franco did not decide until December 23 that he would attempt to relieve his besieged comrades and thereby suspend for a while the offensive he had planned for Guadalajara. The newsreels now proceeded to resume their in-depth coverage of the hostilities perhaps because, once again, they felt the War to be near an end. Certainly Paramount's report for January 6⁶⁸ suggested that such was at the back of their mind for its headline ran "500,000 Spaniards locked in death fight for Teruel" then they followed this up with a lead-in title which read: "Aragon. Is it the turning point? Both sides stake all in bloodiest battle of the Civil War."

There was a great deal of confusion about events

68. BP Issue No.716, 6/1/38. "500,000 Spaniards locked in death fight for Teruel".

surrounding the battle for Teruel. By Christmas, Barcelona Radio announced that the town had fallen to the Republican forces besieging it. Meanwhile on January 1 Franco announced the fall of the town to his forces. Gaumont's report for January 3⁶⁹ showed how thoroughly up to date their news service was by spotlighting Teruel as a town "in which a Franco garrison was besieged" and going on to mention that "Later reports said that Franco had recaptured Teruel but this was denied by the Government", not forgetting to add their customary rejoinder that "whichever side is winning battles, Spain is always the loser." In fact the town did not capitulate to the Republican forces until January 8, whereupon the besiegers became the besieged until the town was recaptured by Franco on February 7.

The delay in both Republican and Nationalist military activities was to a great extent caused by the snow and blizzards which beset that part of the country, a factor which did not escape the attention of Gaumont who made use of it as part of a jokey story on "Snow in different parts of the world".⁷⁰ They commented that "Snowfall heralds no playtime in the war zones of Spain.

69. GB Issue No.419, 3/1/38. "Spanish Civil War centres upon Teruel".

70. GB Issue No.423, 17/1/38. "Snow in different parts of the world, Spain".

This is generally thought to be a land of sunshine but actually its winter can be a time of bitter cold. Round Teruel the men of Franco's army still pursue their desperate hunt for victory, snow for them means only additional hardship...It's a pity the snow can't sweep away the war itself." The Moorish troops amid Franco's forces who were not used to such extremes of cold and who lacked winter clothing must have echoed such sentiments.

Throughout the month of January the Nationalists also pursued a relentless campaign of bombing against Republican cities and against Barcelona in particular. The Nationalists had virtual control of the air by this point in the war and proceeded to use it to bomb Republican cities at random. One particularly devastating raid took place upon Barcelona on January 28. The raid lasted one and a half minutes and left 150 dead. The day before Paramount had released a story in issue 722⁷¹ which contained headlines that sounded remarkably similar to the events which were to follow the day after. The story was entitled "138 Killed by Franco Planes' Lightning Raid" and the titles proclaimed "The raid which made Europe gasp. 90 seconds of death and destruction." A likely explanation is that the first newsreel prints rushed to the West End Halls for January 27 simply referred to another Barcelona air-raid, whereas in the light of the happenings of the day

71. BP Issue No.722, 27/1/38. "138 Killed by Franco Planes' Lightning Raid".

after, Paramount could simply capitalise upon the latest news and augment their old pictures with new titles for release to cinemas in the rest of the country, which got them later. So it was that they appeared to be keeping right up to the minute with their news coverage and their library entries recorded the new amended titles.

Gaumont continued to use the destructive capacity of aerial bombardment for purposes other than simple reportage. Their release for February 3⁷² contained a long story entitled "Planes in Peace and War". It concluded by bringing up "The question of bombers which bring death to British subjects from the wars of other nations". This particular part of the story noted: "Three warplanes belonging to General Franco's Air Force dropped bombs near the London steamer Thorpeness and seven of the crew were killed." The report went on to show film of the burial of the crew members at Tarragona and a tribute being paid at the funeral by Spanish Government troops. Emmett's script pointed out that "The Thorpeness carried on her top deck a Union Jack painted on a tarpaulin 25 feet by 18 feet." But he failed to add that in all probability the planes had been Italian planes for in January there was a sudden outburst of both Italian submarine and aeroplane activity in the Mediterranean. Two attempts to sink British merchant ships bringing supplies to the Republic

72. GB Issue No.428, 3/2/38. "Planes in Peace and War".

had been made on January 15 and 19 and on February 1 the British ship Endymion was actually sunk. Strong words from Eden brought an end to the submarine activity but aerial attacks continued for a while afterwards.

The story on "Planes in Peace and War" had begun, however, with a piece entitled "Wellington Bomber" which Emmett used to demonstrate Britain's own potential in the field of aerial bombardment. It was placed at the very beginning of the release and ran:

Latest addition to the ranks of Britain's Air Force is the Wellington Bomber, now undergoing its first trials. It is of Geodetic construction, which means that it has the whole of the interior available for accommodation, free from obstruction from supporting struts and wires. The Wellington is a twin-engined monoplane, with retractable undercarriage, and is capable of carrying a crew of seven. The armament includes three guns, one forward, one amidships and one aft. Particulars of weight, range and speed are on the secret list, but they are said to compare favourably with any in the world.

Presumably his intention in starting the story with a report on the Wellington Bomber was such that it might act as a palliative for the events that were to follow with the mention of the Thorpeness. But it also had wider implications with regard to Britain's re-armament programme. For Gaumont once more began a newsreel campaign to prepare the cinema audience for the expected increases in armaments. This manifested itself next in a story entitled "Chamberlain and Defence" which was released on March 10. The story commented:

In the House of Commons Debate on Britain's Re-armament the Prime Minister said that he desired to see our country strong because he believed that in her strength lay the best hope of peace. Nobody in Britain wants war; and it is in the firm belief that our re-armament is a safeguard of peace that we watch the enormous increase in our Naval Military and Air Force power. While the political situation remains as it is at present our safety lies in our strength. At the same time Mr. Chamberlain made it clear that he proposed to continue his policy of talks with European Powers to restore confidence and tranquility. These are the Premier's aims. The root of his cry is liberty.

And Mr. Chamberlain said that the best way to avoid the dread necessity of fighting at all lies in the programme of defence put forward by the Government. In addition to the front line strength normally associated with re-armament we must also take into account reserves of raw materials which would be required in armament manufacture. The Premier also spoke of morale and personnel. As far as Britain's air power is concerned, the training of pilots and their racial temperament, must also be included in the estimate.

But what of tomorrow? The piling up of arms into what the Premier has described as almost terrifying power is their safeguard. Not only for ourselves but for the children who will be the men and women of the future.⁷³

The message is as it had been over a year earlier when the story "Britain re-arms" had been released: one of peace through strength with an emphasis that Britain was not re-arming out of feelings of hostility towards any particular nation but more out of a desire to protect her own interests. It was a message which took on added poignancy when three days after "Chamberlain and Defence"

73. GB Issue No.438, 10/3/38. "Chamberlain and Defence".

was released, on March 13, Hitler entered Vienna and incorporated Austria into Germany. By this point Gaumont's opinions on re-armament were so well formed they could be included in any crisis story, whether it be on Spain or Austria. So everything that had so far been said on re-armament as an adjunct to the Spanish Civil War was now switched over to the coverage of the Austrian situation. And Gaumont's issue 440,⁷⁴ after showing "the first actual pictures received from Austria following the fall of the Schussnigg Government and the advance of the German troops", went on to recount the by now familiar message:

What of our position in Britain today. Mass meetings have been held in Trafalgar Square and the Prime Minister has made a statement in the House of Commons; both make it clear that Britain's duty is to herself. Britain must be strong and even the present re-armament programme must be speeded up. An appeal to employers and workers of all kinds will be made to co-operate in the time of national emergency.

Shadow factories where the production of aircraft is proceeding must be able to produce at greater speed than hitherto. Production of armaments in all departments must be increased by national effort. Not to take part in war, nor to interfere in the wars of others but to preserve the peace of our own Empire. These are the guarantees of our national security, our independence, demanding expenditure down to the last shilling if necessary.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, has called for a million air-raid workers. Here again it is no alarmist call but a wise determination to be prepared. The Home Secretary said that the more disturbed is the

74. GB Issue No.440, 17/3/38. "Austria".

continent of Europe, the more urgent it is for us to make every possible preparation against the most dangerous form of modern warfare. If Britain is prepared then air-raid terrors will be less formidable.

British morale and the personnel of the Empire's fighting forces are second to none. Our soldiers and sailors and airmen are unrivalled, but without the implements of war they would be hopeless. A nation's fighting strength today depends almost as much upon the skill of the engineer and the scientist, as it does upon those who carry arms. The spirit of Britain, backed by all the weight of armaments that she is capable of producing will guarantee the safety of our people, not only now, but also in the future. If a sacrifice is called for to provide those armaments, those aeroplanes and guns and tanks and battleships that comprise the grim paraphernalia of war, then let us make that sacrifice. What sacrifice could be too great to make in exchange for security, the safety of our homes and our own people, your safety?

Less than a week after this Gaumont report the Government took what A.J.P. Taylor considers to be the third clear step in the advance of British armaments. For on March 22 "the services were freed from the restriction not to interfere with 'normal' trade. Henceforward, for example, manufactures could be induced to switch their works to making aeroplanes, despite the civilian demand for motor cars."⁷⁵ This, together with the T.U.C. agreement to relax craft restrictions in the engineering industry on March 23, "marked the real beginning of a war economy."⁷⁶ The newsreels had done their part in preparing the country

75. Taylor, English History, p.412.

76. Ibid., p.413.

for such a Government move.

Spain continued to exercise British statesmen throughout this period, albeit to a lesser degree. The most serious repercussions, as far as the British Government was concerned, arose over the resignation of Eden as Foreign Secretary. Clearly the agreement between Italy and Great Britain, made in January 1937, had gone little way towards alleviating the tension that had developed between the two countries. The Italian submarine campaign had shown that. Now, in February 1938, Chamberlain was anxious to revive negotiations over the agreement. Eden for his part saw this as an opportunity to ensure that some Italian volunteers were withdrawn from Spain before Anglo-Italian talks should start. Chamberlain did not.

Gaumont's report on Eden's resignation, which occurred on February 20, stated quite simply that he resigned "following a difference of opinion with the Premier" and that "Britain's relations with Italy were the cause of the break".⁷⁷ It added that "he still enjoys the high esteem of all his colleagues and the general public." Apart from reporting the result of a vote of censure on the Government in the House of Commons, which was defeated by 330 votes to 168, and noting thereby that "Parliament stands by the Premier" Gaumont had nothing more to say about the event.

77. GB Issue No.434, 24/2/38. "Anthony Eden resigns".

Paramount went one step further and invited Clement Attlee to comment upon Eden's resignation.⁷⁸ The idea of inviting a politician, and the Leader of the Opposition at that, to comment upon such a resignation was indeed new and unprecedented. Paramount must have approached the idea with some trepidation. So rather than give Attlee the respectable surroundings which they normally afforded political personages, at least those who were in power, they chose to record his speech in the open air where he was obviously disturbed by the sounds of nearby traffic. He was given none of the trappings of authority which had previously been given to Baldwin and Chamberlain in interviews of this sort. Nonetheless Attlee's speech is in itself highly critical:

Everywhere this will be hailed as a great victory for Signor Mussolini and throughout the world it will be said that this country has surrendered to the demands of a dictator. They are not prepared to stand for the League of Nations; they are not prepared to stand for Democracy; they are prepared to make any kind of a deal with the dictatorship powers. There will be no longer in this country a Government that is prepared to stand up for international law and right, but a Government that is prepared to enter into any kind of a deal with aggressive Fascist powers. This policy is not a policy that would lead to peace, it will not lead to a settlement of the affairs of Europe. It is essentially a war policy and it aligns this country with the reactionary forces of the world. The repercussions of this event will be widespread in the Dominions, in the

78. BP Issue No.730, 24/2/38. "Mr. Attlee expresses the views of the Opposition Parties".

Colonies, and throughout the world. It is most noticeable everywhere that the enemies of peace and democracy are rejoicing, and the friends of this country are depressed.

Attlee's interpretation of the situation proved to be correct, at least in part, for Hitler and Mussolini claimed that they had forced Eden from office and, what is more important, "many English people believed their boast."⁷⁹ In the event the new pact which Chamberlain so dearly wanted was not signed until April 16. Gaumont immediately announced that "after many months of mistrust and misunderstanding between Great Britain and Italy, friendship has been renewed".⁸⁰ At the same time they noted that "It was hailed as a major contribution towards the settlement of European problems", finally adding: "France once again will fall into step with Great Britain in the cause of world peace". But like the pact of a year earlier little was solved by this new agreement, apart from the guarantee to maintain the status quo in the Mediterranean, for Britain continued to tolerate the presence of Italian troops in Spain until the war was over. Indeed the one condition to the agreement, which stated the pact would not come into operation until the Italian volunteers were withdrawn, presumably after a victory for Franco, was dropped later in the year, Britain's duplicity over Spain was now

79. Taylor, English History, p.423.

80. GB Issue No.450, 21/4/38. "Anglo-Italian Pact signed in Rome".

revealed in its true light and the Republican Ambassador, Azcarate, sent a protest to the Foreign Office "expressing his horror that the public exchange of letters between Italy and Britain should calmly accept Italian troops in Spain till the end of the Civil War, while at the same time Britain was nominally maintaining the Non-Intervention Pact and a plan for the withdrawal of volunteers".⁸¹ However Britain was less interested in the internal conflicts of the War in Spain and more interested in trying to detach Mussolini from Hitler.

At the beginning of March Franco had determined upon his next offensive into Aragon. The campaign began on March 9. The success he achieved was swift and immediate and on March 10 Belchite fell. Paramount reported the victory on March 24 under the title "Franco Push: End Near?"⁸² with film of General Yague as "the Insurgents drive through towards Barcelona, while the Government fall back before the fiercest onslaught of the year". In fact it was an army corps of Navarrese under the command of General Solchaga that took the town. But the success of Franco's army in Aragon prompted both newsreels to turn their attention once again to the actual fighting. Gaumont and Paramount did general reports in their respective releases for March 31. Gaumont noted: "Insurgent troops sweep on

81. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.530.

82. BP Issue No.738, 24/3/38. "Franco push: End Near?"

in General Franco's biggest drive since the war began. Night and day the tramp of marching feet echoes among the hills on the Aragon front".⁸³ They then singled out the retreating Republicans and mentioned that "Government defenders have destroyed all bridges that lay in their retreating path but pontoons built by Franco's engineers take their place and the troops press forward over the Ebro river." Emmett concluded: "Spain's Government are holding on desperately." Paramount also highlighted the crossing of the Ebro, which had taken place when General Yague crossed with his troops on March 23, in a story entitled "Barcelona faces defeat".⁸⁴ One week later both companies again spotlighted the same story this time from Luchon in the Pyrenees where refugees were pouring into France.⁸⁵ As Emmett's script commented: "On the Government side it is a story of falling back...These are the contrasts, advance and retreat."

The War was escalating all the time in favour of Franco. On March 25 General Yague captured Fraga, actually in Catalonia, and then marched on to Lerida where for a week he was thwarted by a division of Republican troops under El Campesino. But Lerida eventually fell on April 3. Paramount covered both victories in their report for

83. GB Issue No.444, 31/3/38. "Insurgents continue to advance on Aragon front".

84. BP Issue No.740, 31/3/38. "Barcelona faces defeat".

85. GB Issue No.446, 7/4/38. "Spain"; BP Issue No.742, 7/4/38. "News in Flashes, Luchon".

April 11 with a story called "Lerida. Now Victory?"⁸⁶ showed "graphic pictures of the final stages as Franco's forces race onwards with victory beckoning", along with shots of Franco and Davila, the commander in chief of the Aragon offensive army. The War was indeed going badly for the Republic and the newsreels naturally tended to reflect that fact, while at the same time preparing the cinema audience for the end of the hostilities, and "by April 15 it did seem that the end of the war must be near".⁸⁷

The Republic was hard-pressed and on May 13 Alvarez del Vayo went before the Council of the League of Nations in an attempt to make the members who had agreed to Non-Intervention reconsider their action in view of the fact that it had proved to be ineffective. But Halifax forced a quick vote on the issue and no further action was taken. Gaumont reported upon the events in their release for May 16.⁸⁸ They glossed over Spain almost completely, simply stating: "Representatives of many nations gathered for discussions on Abyssinia, Spain and China." Then they ignored any discussion which ensued on Spain to show that "There were two representatives of Abyssinia in addition to

86. BP Issue No.743, 11/4/38. "Lerida. Now Victory?"

87. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.530.

88. GB Issue No.457, 16/5/38. "The League discusses Abyssinia, Spain and China".

the Emperor himself, who came to hear the views of the British Government in a speech to the Council by Lord Halifax." But the attempt to mollify Mussolini continued for "in his speech Lord Halifax pointed out that it was the view of the British Government that each member of the League should choose its own course of action with regard to recognising the Italian conquest."

The newsreels might choose to ignore Spain at the meeting of the League but events in Spain itself compelled Halifax to turn his attention towards it when on June 2, Granollers, a town near Barcelona, was bombed. The town had no military value and most of the casualties were women and children, amounting to some four to five hundred deaths. Paramount's release for June 9⁸⁹ covered the story. Despite a title announcing "400 killed in air-raid" the actual film in the report of the bombed-out market town was markedly restrained in comparison to the overall footage which their cameraman had sent back. The shots in the release concentrate for the most part upon film of dead adults with one or two shots of injured children. The footage they did not release contained horrifying scenes of headless children, dead babies and row upon row of children's coffins.⁹⁰ The newsreels' fears for the susceptibilities of the cinemagoing audience proved to be

89. BP Issue No.760, 9/6/38. "400 Killed in air-raid".

90. BP Library No.7545. "Bombing of Granollers". (Not issued.)

the strongest motivating force in preventing this material from being shown and the true horror of Granollers was kept from the eyes of the British public. But public outcry was aroused over this incident and Halifax felt compelled to send telegrams of protest to Burgos, though little resulted.

By June the rapid advances made by the Nationalist forces were beginning to slow down. On April 15 Vinaroz had been taken, cutting the Republic in two and thereby giving Franco a foothold on the shores of the Mediterranean. But Castellon some sixty miles south of Vinaroz and only fifty miles north of Valencia, was not captured until June 14 giving Franco his first large Mediterranean port. Paramount cameramen were there when Aranda entered the town in triumph and the story appeared in their issue for June 20.⁹¹ It had been a slow, tortuous victory and "the situation in mid-June did not suggest to anyone in Spain that the war would soon be over."⁹²

The attitudes of the protagonists in Spain turned, at least on the surface, to thoughts of peace. Paramount continued to follow the implications of such thinking closely in its newsreel coverage. Its release for September 5⁹³ showed the first exchange of war prisoners

91. BP Issue No.763, 20/6/38. "The Fall of Castellon".

92. Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.541.

93. BP Issue No.785, 5/9/38. "Spain swaps prisoners".

supervised by a British Commission at Hendaye. Almost a year earlier in October, 1937, the Republic had first proposed to the British that they negotiate such exchanges, but it was not until September, 1938, that a commission arrived under the guidance of Field-Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode. But bigger exchanges were afoot for on July 27, 1937, Maisky had agreed to the plan for a withdrawal of volunteers and in October Stalin agreed to the withdrawal of the International Brigades. Furthermore, at Munich, Mussolini had suggested to Chamberlain that 10,000 Italian volunteers might be withdrawn in order to pave the way for the implementation of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. On October 20, the 10,000 Italians arrived back in Italy at the port of Naples. Paramount were there and their newsreel for October 24⁹⁴ showed film of their arrival amid scenes of jubilation from the populace and a personal welcome from King Victor Emmanuel. At long last Paramount acknowledged that they had been "fighting in the Spanish Insurgent Army" but at the same time made it obvious that they were only being withdrawn as a result of British diplomacy. In consequence the Anglo-Italian Agreement came fully into force on November 16, meriting a brief mention in Paramount's report for November 21.⁹⁵ The last action fought by the International Brigades took place on September 22 and they

94. BP Issue No.799, 24/10/38. "Duce calls troops home".

95. BP Issue No.807, 21/11/38. "News in Flashes; Rome".

were given an emotional parade of farewell in Barcelona on November 15, with laudatory speeches being showered upon them by La Pasionaria and Negrin, the Republican Premier. Paramount's film of the farewell parade could not fail to capture some of the emotion, as the ticker-tape rained upon the Brigades from a grateful Republican crowd.⁹⁶

At one point in November, Paramount took time off from the apparently peace-ridden proceedings to report that the Civil War itself had even reached the North Sea when the the Cantabria, a Republican steamer carrying food supplies, was sunk seven miles off Cromer by the Nationalist ship, the Nadir. They showed "The Captain and survivors of the Cantabria land after their ship was sunk by a Franco Q-Ship".⁹⁷ The story included an interview with the skipper of the lifeboat that picked the survivors up during which he recounted: "After taking them off, I suggested going across to the foreign warship but the Captain said 'No, no, Fascists ship, no go there'. When we were leaving the damaged ship appeared to be sinking rapidly and she now lies 90 feet underwater." The war still continued but further stories from Paramount, such as the one announcing that "French volunteers return from Spain",⁹⁸ strongly suggested that it was drawing to a close.

- 96. BP Issue No.808, 24/11/38. "News in Flashes; Barcelona".
- 97. BP Issue No.803, 7/11/38. "Spanish War in North Sea".
- 98. BP Issue No.806, 17/11/38. "News in Flashes; Pyrenees".

Gaumont for their part continued to propagate generally their message of peace with strength for Britain. It was perhaps best shown during this period by a story that had nothing to do with Spain at all. Their coverage of the Armistice Day celebrations for November 1938 ran:

In November 1920 a soldier who had died for his country came home. He had no name and so he was chosen to represent his million comrades, known and unknown, who gave their lives for us. Each year we have remembered those who died. And through all these changing years this simple service has remained unchanged.

There need never be another Cenotaph if Britain is strong enough to defy the threat of war. That is why all men and women, however different their opinions, should work together for the sake of our Empire. We in Britain have a hatred of war, but to fear war is to provoke it. It is the duty of our generation to be fit; it is not sufficient today to live in the Empire, we must also serve it. Britain must be strong. If our fighting services are great our youth may live in them today. If they are weak our manhood must die in them tomorrow. Britain must be strong until the world returns to sanity and all men may live together in Peace.⁹⁹

Gaumont now used any excuse to put forward the line that the only way Britain could live in peace was for her to be strong. In the first instance Spain had served to provide such an excuse, then Austria. Now a simple ceremony, which was covered every year by the newsreels without any overtones, was made use of by Emmett in his campaign.

In the meantime their coverage of the Spanish Civil

99. GB Issue No.509, 14/11/38. "Armistice Day".

War took on a slightly different face, at least for one particular release. For Gaumont's report on December 8 stated openly that their story on "Madrid bombed by bread"¹⁰⁰ amounted to "propaganda with a punch, an attempt to indicate to the citizens of Madrid that the Insurgent troops have enough to eat and some to spare". It was "a story of aerial bombardment with a difference" because it showed several tons of bread, which had been made at the Insurgent Forces' bakeries, being loaded onto bombers at a Saragossa airfield. As Emmett so succinctly put it Franco's bombers were loaded up "not with bombs, but with the staff of life". The loaves were to be dropped over Government lines and on Madrid. Gaumont had on several occasions commented that the Nationalists were not short of food, as were the besieged Republicans. Here the Nationalists were seen to be overtly flaunting the fact.

Emmett reverted to his customary line on peace with strength for Gaumont's next report which was released on December 12.¹⁰¹ The release opened with a story on the return of the British contingent of the International Brigades from Spain to London. It noted: "In the gloom of a winter evening men of the British Battalion of the International Brigade returned to London from Spain." Then it picked out notable personalities who welcomed them

100. GB Issue No.516, 8/12/38. "Madrid bombed with bread".

101. GB Issue No.517, 12/12/38. "International Brigade return from Spain".

home, including Clement Attlee, Sir Stafford Cripps and Ellen Wilkinson. The film then shows the men marching through London before they are entertained to dinner. Emmett's final comment is: "They all seem very carefree, having lived with death round the corner for two years they have probably lost the habit of worrying over trifles."

The story was followed by one of equal length showing President Roosevelt at a sick children's hospital in Georgia during Thanksgiving Day celebrations. The President proceeds to read out a speech before the camera and Emmett's first draft noted that it contained "a message that is particularly appropriate in the world as it is today." This sentence was excised but the point still remained, particularly as it followed the Brigade story, for Roosevelt went on to say: "May you and yours have a happy Thanksgiving. I am thankful that I live in a country where our leader sits down on Thanksgiving Day to carve up a turkey instead of a map." In fact the President was reading from a telegram which had been sent to him by Eddie Cantor, the show business personality. The words spoken were not his own but, in the context of the story as it appeared, it made little difference for, as Emmett put it, the President chose the opportunity "to make the Turkey Festival an occasion of international importance." Indeed the whole of Gaumont's release was given international importance for the final story was entitled "The Defence of France, No.4; Colonial Troops." The Defence of France was a six part weekly series which

had been compiled by Gaumont presumably to reassure the British people of the strength of our closest ally in the light of post-Munich Europe. The first one had been released on November 21 and had concentrated upon the fortifications along The Maginot Line, which the newsreel claimed were impregnable and stretched from Dunkirk to Switzerland. Other stories in the series highlighted the French Air Raid Precautions, the French Navy, and French Tanks.

Gaumont's final report on Spain came in its Review of the Year for 1938.¹⁰² It recounted that "World Affairs in 1938 have been depressing and a frightening problem." But it was no longer possible to single out the Spanish Civil War from other wars and altercations across the globe. It did still merit a mention as Emmett spotlighted:

China, still wracked with war. The bombing of the American gunboat Panay shocked the world. The Japanese aggression marched on, invaders took all the key cities with death and merciless destruction.

Closer to home Emmett commented:

The war situation in Spain reached almost checkmate. Ships were bombed on the high seas. Austria fell to Germany. Czechoslovakia; the story of the Sudeten Germans nearly brought war to the whole of Europe. Britain prepared.

But to conclude, Emmett recalled that "Agreement was

102. GB Issue No.522, 29/12/38. "Review of the Year; Foreign Affairs".

reached when Mr. Chamberlain flew to Germany", only to end on an often heard but still prophetic note as he added: "Then, Re-armament".

Chapter 8The End of the War:Conclusion

At the very beginning of January, 1939, the newsreels still appeared to have lost interest in the actual course of the fighting in Spain. Gaumont, for example, chose instead to show film of a memorial service at Earl's Court for men from the British Battalion of the International Brigade who had fallen in Spain.¹ In any case a lot of newsreel time was being taken up with reporting the events surrounding the visit, early in January, of Chamberlain and Halifax to Mussolini in Rome, where they hoped to persuade him to act as a moderating influence upon Hitler. In the same release which contained the short report of the memorial service, Gaumont spent most of the time on film as "Chamberlain leaves for Rome talks".² Paramount also ran a story on that date entitled "Premier in Rome to appease Duce",³ and followed this up in the next issue with a report which revealed the apparent fruits of Chamberlain's success by noting: "Duce tells Premier Italy needs Peace".⁴

Franco was also enjoying renewed success in Spain

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1. GB Issue No.526, 12/1/39. "Roving Camera Reports: Earl's Court Memorial Service".
 2. Ibid., "Chamberlain leaves for Rome Talks".
 3. BP Issue No.822, 12/1/39. "Premier in Rome to appease Duce".
 4. BP Issue No.823, 16/1/39. "Duce tells Premier Italy needs Peace".

and it was the newfound success of the Nationalists which eventually turned the newsreels' centre of attention back again to the Civil War. On December 23, Franco had launched a new offensive against Catalonia. The Ebro campaign had severely weakened the Republican forces and within a week of the new year Franco met with a series of immediate victories. Paramount commented that "Spectacular success attends Insurgent offensive towards Spanish Government headquarters",⁵ while Gaumont reported: "The fiercest fighting of all Spain's long drawn-out Civil War is taking place in the defence of Barcelona".⁶ But on January 19 at least nobody as yet foresaw an end to the war. Gaumont's commentary went on to add:

There seems to be no end to the manpower of Spain, ready to fill the gaps in the firing line, ready to advance into a new city conquered, conquered but wrecked beyond recognition. What better evidence could anyone wish of the futility of war?

The might of the Nationalist armour broke the Republican front and by January 14, General Yague drove out from Gandesa along the Ebro and captured Tarragona. Gaumont covered the victory on January 23,⁷ noting that "Palm-lined streets and grim fighting men make a distressing contrast" but also revealing that normality was at least

5. Ibid., "Franco's big thrust menaces Barcelona".

6. GB Issue No.528, 19/1/39. "Defence of Barcelona".

7. GB Issue No.529, 23/1/39. "Franco's troops take Tarragona".

returning by stating: "On the day following the entry of the conquering army Mass was said in the public square, attended by the Generals who had directed the offensive". On that same date Paramount reported that "Franco's onslaught nears Barcelona" and commented that it appeared to herald "an offensive which bids fair to end the Civil War".⁸

The reports started to proliferate again. Cameramen were hurried back to Spain to cover what it was now thought would be an imminent end to the fighting. Once more each release by the newsreels featured coverage of Spain. In one issue Gaumont could comment, "Day by day the march of Franco's army brought conquest nearer to the Government stronghold of Barcelona",⁹ and by the next they could announce: "At long last, after two and a half years of Civil War, the Government stronghold in the south of Spain has capitulated."¹⁰ Barcelona had fallen on January 26. But with such victories came another endless flow of refugees and the opportunity for Emmett to decry war, as he went on to do in the same story with a concluding invective:

What is the matter with mankind? What
foul disease is rotting the brains of

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- 8. BP Issue No.825, 23/1/39. "Franco's onslaught nears Barcelona".
 - 9. GB Issue No.530, 26/1/39. "Franco reaches Barcelona".
 - 10. GB Issue No.531, 30/1/39. "The Fall of Barcelona".

our civilisation? What inhumanity impels one half of the living world to make life an intolerable burden for the other?

The contrast between a victorious Nationalist army on the one hand, and a stream of refugees on the other, very much set the pattern for the coverage of the war from this point on. Gaumont's next release showed the entry of General Yague into Barcelona, with the customary observance of Holy Mass in Catalonia Square at which "many thousands of men and women were present to watch this religious observance of the victorious troops". Then the story cut to shots of Franco adding, "General Franco seldom permits himself to be filmed, but when he does he seems to prefer to appear as the man of peace in the bosom of his family." Emmett proceeded from there to make his point by cutting away to numerous shots of refugees accompanied by a commentary which ran:

Now take a look at the other side of the story. A constant stream of men, women and children, mostly fellow-countrymen of those same victorious troops, fleeing towards the French border and the hopes of rest and safety.

Most of the men of military age are crippled, crushed in the war machine. The women have the marks of despair seared across their faces, where they should know only the cares of household and motherhood. They seek sanctuary and charity within the frontiers of a neighbour's land.¹¹

In their release Paramount revealed the hardship and plight

11. GB Issue No.532, 2/2/39. "Both sides of the war in Spain".

of many of the refugees with a story from the Pyrenees of women and children escaping from Spain through the snow.¹²

For a while the French Government refused to allow Spanish refugees entry into France, because of the heavy cost to them of maintaining camps to house the swelling numbers of homeless people. They proposed a neutral zone along the Spanish frontier supported by money from foreign relief but Franco vetoed the plan. As a result the French opened the border on January 27 to civilians and wounded men, and from February 5 they extended the provision to include Republican soldiers as long as they surrendered their arms. Both Gaumont and Paramount announced the re-opening of the frontier in their respective reports for February 9.¹³ In fact by this point in time these two newsreels were almost duplicating each other's coverage. When Solchaga reached the French frontier at Le Perthus with his Nationalist troops, both companies were there to film the event and both companies released the film in their issues for February 13.¹⁴ Gaumont noted: "The Spanish Royalist flag was hoisted to a telegraph pole and the conquest of Catalonia had become a fact."

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- 12. BP Issue No.828, 2/2/39. "Starving refugees pour into France".
 - 13. GB Issue No.534, 9/2/39. "Refugees retreat from Barcelona"; BP Issue No.830, 9/2/39. "France opens frontier to defeated army".
 - 14. GB Issue No.535, 13/2/39. "Franco's troops reach French frontier"; BP Issue No.831, 13/2/39. "Franco's troops reach French frontier".

Catalonia was indeed conquered. On February 1 a band of sixty-two members of the Cortes had met at Figueras, the last Catalan town before the French border. Negrin put forward three peace proposals which he hoped would guarantee Spanish independence, the right of the Spanish people to elect their own Government, and freedom from persecution. The Cortes duly accepted the proposals, then everybody left for France. The conditions for peace were handed over to French and British ministers in order that they might mediate with the Nationalists. But they need hardly have bothered. Paramount recounted the capture of Figueras, which occurred on February 8 when Navarrese took the town, in a story entitled "Franco mops up before attacking Madrid"¹⁵ and by February 10 the whole Catalan border with France was in Nationalist hands. Britain was called in to mediate, as well, in Minorca. It too surrendered on February 10 but not before the British Consul in Majorca had been invited, by the Nationalists this time, to arrange the surrender. The Foreign Office agreed, extracting a promise that neither German nor Italian troops would be allowed on the island for a period of two years after the event. On receipt of such a promise HMS Devonshire was despatched to ferry the negotiators between Majorca and Port Mahon, as well as to transport Republican sympathisers to Marseilles. Emmett's first draft of his script for

15. BP Issue No.832, 16/2"39. "Franco mops up before attacking Madrid".

release on February 16 intended to say:

Parliament has asked a question about the part played by HMS Devonshire in the Minorca peace negotiations but Mr. Chamberlain assured the House that all that had been done was to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

In the event he chose to ignore any notes of disquiet surrounding the incident and instead emphasised its salutary aspects by stating:

Arriving at Marseilles is the British cruiser Devonshire landing 450 refugees from Minorca. HMS Devonshire has been in the seas of the war zone, taking no part in war, but serving only the interests of humanity.¹⁶

Paramount continued to highlight the plight of the Spanish refugees housed in camps inside the French border at such places as Le Boulou, Argeles and St. Cyprien. But these camps needed money to sustain the refugees. The French Government provided thirty million francs then invited other countries to help either by accepting refugees or by giving donations. Britain helped though on a modest scale. Paramount's newsreel for February 20¹⁷ showed the attempts of one British appeal to raise money in a story entitled "Artists aid refugees by painting on hoardings". It spotlighted several artists decorating pleas for money

16. Typewritten script to GB Issue No.536, 16/2/39, "HMS Devonshire rescues refugees", with handwritten amendments to same for final commentary.

17. BP Issue No.833, 20/2/39. "Artists aid refugees by painting on hoardings".

on hoardings near Tower Bridge. As a result of appeals like this the British Red Cross amassed a sum of £50,000 with which to provide food and medical supplies for the refugee camps. The squalor and destitution of the camps was further emphasised by Paramount in its next report with film of the shanty town which had been erected at Argeles.¹⁸

The war itself was clearly almost at an end. In their respective releases for February 27, Paramount and Gaumont now had no hesitation in stating that the Nationalist Army contained Italians, who were singled out during the course of a victory parade through Barcelona which was presided over by General Franco.¹⁹ Some time later Paramount went on to show "Franco's farewell to foreign pilots",²⁰ at which it was acknowledged that he was reviewing and awarding medals to German and Italian airmen who had fought for him throughout the Civil War.

On February 27 Britain and France officially recognised Franco. In their next report Gaumont released a "Review of the War" which encapsulated their thinking on the events which had taken place in Spain, accompanied by a visual run-through of the highlights of the war. The commentary ran:

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- 18. BP Issue No.834, 23/2/39. "Refugees set France difficult problem".
 - 19. BP Issue No.835, 27/2/39. "Victory crowns Franco. Recognition next?"; GB Issue No.539, 27/2/39. "General Franco reviews troops".
 - 20. BP Issue No.858, 18/5/39. "Franco's farewell to foreign pilots".

The latter years of Spanish history have covered pages and chapters of unrivalled catastrophe. Riots and unrest culminated in July 1936 in the unofficial commencement of Civil War. General Franco marched on Madrid. His early successes on the way to the capital resulted in a stream of refugees seeking sanctuary in Gibraltar. From then till now that stream of homeless human beings has never ceased to flow. Madrid prepared defence; men, women and boys armed themselves to defend the Government under the command of General Miaja, whom both sides and the whole world had acclaimed a soldier of genius. In Burgos, the Nationalist headquarters, General Franco was filmed for the first time. The Insurgent armies advanced, they captured Irun. The story of the siege of the Alcazar is one of deathless glory. After terrific resistance, Toledo fell to Franco's troops.

Parliament in London was gravely beset by concern lest this foreign flame might kindle the fires of war outside the boundaries of Spain and destroy all Europe. General conflict was avoided. Then more key cities fell to Franco, Bilbao, Gijon, and the latest and greatest, Barcelona, bombarded from land, sea and air.

In Barcelona, the Government army cracked and countless thousands of military and civilian refugees swarmed through the gates of hospitality into neutral France. The President of the Spanish Republic, Senor Azana, fled also into France, and he resigned. Then, acting in accord, France and Britain decided to recognise General Franco, hoping thereby to stem the tide of killing and destruction. In London, the Ambassador of Republican Spain left the Embassy and the Duke of Alba took his place.

This is the fate of Spain. We cannot do better than quote the words of Britain's Prime Minister, who hoped that once the fighting ended, Spain would unite to repair the destruction, to build up a happy country worthy of the glorious past of Spain.²¹

21. GB Issue No.540, 2/3/39. "Review of the Spanish Civil War".

It was a long story, comprising some 199 feet of film, and it was placed at the very end of the release. But for all its length Gaumont were compelled to condense the events portrayed to a very great extent. They still managed to refer, however, to the one major factor which had guided their attitude to the Spanish Civil War throughout. For the fear "that this foreign flame might kindle the fires of war outside the boundaries of Spain, and destroy all Europe" had undoubtedly determined the outcome of Gaumont's newsreel coverage. In the beginning they had gone out of their way to emphasise that the war was a local conflict, that it was a Civil War affecting Spaniards alone. But when it began to exercise European statesmen generally, Gaumont chose not to report the extent of European involvement in Spain. They only reported peace missions when they appeared to achieve success. And when it became clear that Europe was still being drawn more and more into the Spanish conflict, Gaumont brought Spain into the campaign which they began to conduct for Britain's re-armament. Paramount chose not to assemble a review of the war in the way that Gaumont had done. Spain had been for Paramount throughout the war a land of lost opportunity. They had acquiesced in the newsreel line on Spain. More so than Gaumont they had shown the death and destruction in Spain itself and strongly endorsed the message that "War is horrible", while at the same time emphasising the value to Britain of staying out of the conflict. Yet there had always also been a hint in Paramount's coverage that they were

capable of greater things. They were the first newsreel company to reveal the presence of the Army of Africa on Spanish soil. More important they had film of the International Brigades in action in Spain as well as film of German and Italian troops. But they had never shown it and thereby lost the opportunity to make manifest an independent newsreel line on Spain. Now, at the very end of the war, they also lost the opportunity to compile a review of the war.

In fact the Spanish Civil War had not yet come to a close. On February 28, President Azana, who was in Paris, resigned and Martinez Barrio took on the role. In Madrid itself, Colonel Casado, the commander of the Republican Army of the Centre, successfully led a revolt against Prime Minister Negrin on March 4. But the negotiations he tried to conduct with Franco proved to be no more acceptable than those of Negrin. Franco still demanded unconditional surrender and on March 26 the final campaign against Madrid began. By March 28 Colonel Prada surrendered the Army of the Centre in Madrid.

Gaumont announced the surrender of Madrid in their report for March 30.²² "For General Franco", they noted, "this is the hour of triumph and he rides appropriately with an escort of Moors". Emmett used the story on Madrid as a prelude to a general review of the state of Europe. He went on to mention that Marshall Petain, France's Ambassador

22. GB Issue No.548, 30/3/39. "Madrid surrenders".

to the new regime in Spain, and Franco's old comrade-in-arms in Morocco, had arrived in Burgos to present his credentials. From there the story cut to Rome where "Mussolini shouted 'woe to the weak', announced the end of brotherhood and stated that Italy's policy was determined by force". Before leaving Italy Emmett chose to mention that King Victor Emmanuel had also made a speech in which "he emphasised the need for armaments, but stated that Italy desired peace." Next the story cut to Germany and Emmett commented that as a result of Hitler's ultimatum Lithuania had given back her only seaport to Germany, while "the battleship Deutschland carried Hitler to the scene of his latest conquest, Memel."

In conclusion Emmett pointed out that "Britain is not asleep" and to back up his claim showed film of Viscount Gort, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, arriving in France at the invitation of the French Chief of Staff, General Gamelin. "His object was to establish personal contact and to inspect the wonderful Maginot Line that guards the frontiers of our friendly neighbour across the Channel." Finally the story came back to London where "A.R.P. Chief, Sir John Anderson, spoke of the need for preparation at home." Already the newsreels were moving on to new matters for concern, matters that were to involve Britain a great deal more closely than Spain had done.

Both Gaumont and Paramount did return to Spain for further stories in the following months. They showed the return of £8 million in gold, which had been deposited in

Paris by the Republican Government, to Franco and Spain.²³ They showed victory parades,²⁴ Count Ciano visiting Franco,²⁵ Franco visiting naval dockyards,²⁶ and the mass christening of 200 babies in Madrid.²⁷ But the overall message contained in these reports was perhaps best summarised by Ted Emmett who concluded, in one of them:

Let us hope that General Franco will celebrate the fruits of victory by a speedy programme of reconstruction, bringing happiness once more to the sunny land of Spain.²⁸

Optimistic to the end, the newsreels finished with Spain. They had done their job, as far as they saw it, during the Spanish Civil War and, within the bounds which they had set for themselves, they had done their job well.

In an article which was published in July and September of 1937, and which was entitled "Spilling the Spanish Beans", George Orwell came to the conclusion that:

There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy (I could give detailed instances) to prevent

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| 23. | BP Issue No.881, 8/8/39. "News in Flashes: Madrid". |
| 24. | BP Issue No.860, 25/5/39. "News in Flashes: Madrid". |
| 25. | BP Issue No.876, 20/7/39. "Count Ciano visits Franco". |
| 26. | BP Issue No.870, 29/6/39. "General Franco arrives to inspect naval dockyard". |
| 27. | BP Issue No.884, 17/8/39. "Madrid: Mass christening of 200 babies". |
| 28. | GB Issue No.564, 25/5/39. "Franco victory march". |

the Spanish situation from being understood.²⁹

Of course Orwell could have given several detailed instances to prove his point. He would no doubt have cited the New Statesman to back up his argument because it had refused to publish an article which he wrote for it on the events in Catalonia between May and June, 1937, when the Communist Party in Spain had set about a suppression of the P.O.U.M. He would probably also have cited newspapers like the News Chronicle and the Daily Worker because he saw them as part of the same left-wing conspiracy to prevent the facts on Spain from becoming widely known, ostensibly in the cause of presenting a united pro-Republican front to the rest of the world. Only finally would he have instanced the pro-Fascist newspapers as part of the wider conspiracy that prevented the British public from grasping the real nature of the struggle. Indeed he did on numerous occasions deliberate whether it was not the left-wing newspapers, "with their far subtler methods of distortion",³⁰ which did most damage on Spain in comparison with, say, the right-wing newspapers, which after all were guilty of little more, in his words, than "professing to lump all 'reds' together and

29. George Orwell, "Spilling the Spanish Beans", first published in New English Weekly, July 29 and September 2, 1937, and reprinted in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol.1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, Harmondsworth 1971, p.308.

30. Ibid., p.301.

to be equally hostile to all of them".³¹

But it is interesting to extrapolate from Orwell's particular statement and to speculate whether the newsreels formed part of any "conspiracy", whether it be right-wing or left-wing, and of any "deliberate conspiracy" which attempted to prevent the facts on the Spanish Civil War from being made known to the people in this country. And on the basis of the evidence available it becomes obvious that the newsreels did deliberately withhold certain pieces of information. Whether the newsreel companies conspired together to withhold this information is debatable and is, in fact, highly unlikely. In the first instance their response to the Civil War in Spain was a basically humanitarian response. They chose to emphasise the destruction and devastation of the Civil War and they used this as part of a more general argument against the horrors of war. They projected Britain as a stable democracy which, for its own sake, should not involve itself with the conflict in Spain. To this end they endorsed the British Government's policy of neutrality though it took them a long time before they admitted the presence of a Non-Intervention Committee, simply because the policy of Non-Intervention was so fraught with troubles and controversies. And above all the newsreel scrupulously avoided controversial issues. Furthermore they endorsed the Government's tacit approval of Franco. The

31. Orwell, Letter to the Editor of Time and Tide, February 5, 1938, reprinted in Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters Vol.1, p.332.

newsreel companies did not conspire with each other, or with the Government of the day, before giving their approval. They did not need to do so. Franco was the figure chosen for approbation by the British establishment and the newsreels were also a part of that establishment. Similarly when it appeared that Britain was becoming inextricably drawn into a worsening European situation the newsreels wholeheartedly supported the policy of re-arming, first and foremost in order that Britain's own interests might be adequately safeguarded. Of course on each and every issue there were various and conflicting messages emanating from different quarters, in particular from the newspapers. But the newsreels were committed to consensus, not conflict.

It is impossible to ascertain whether the messages on Spain put forward by the newsreels for the consideration of the British cinemagoing public were successful in their purpose of engendering a consensus response. However it should not be forgotten that for many people the cinema newsreel was a major source of information on the pressing issues of the day. The newsreel companies knew that. They also knew that film was a medium which could easily be manipulated and they knew how to manipulate the medium to best advantage. So if the picture of Spain, and indeed of Britain, which they presented was limited and partial in the extreme, then it was deliberately so. If they failed to explain the role of Russia, Germany or Italy in the Spanish Civil War, then again it was for a purpose. If, finally, they failed to explain the causes of the Spanish

Civil War and what the War was about, then there can be no doubt that the newsreels helped to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood.

BIBLIOGRAPHY1. Newsreels

The locations of the various newsreel libraries are as follows:

Gaumont British News	Housed at; Visnews Film Library
British Paramount News	Cumberland Avenue,
Universal News	London, NW16.
Gaumont Graphic	
British Movietone News	Housed at; British Movietone News
	North Orbital Road,
	Denham,
	Uxbridge,
	Middlesex.
Pathé Gazette	Housed at; EMI-Pathé Film Library
	Film House,
	Wardour Street,
	London, W1.

(a) Gaumont British News

The list below cites all the Gaumont British News issues relating to the Spanish Civil War. It gives the issue number, date of release, a brief summary of the story relating to Spain, and any notes relating to that particular issue. The figures appended (in feet) reveal the following statistics:

- (i) The amount of titles footage to the story on Spain.
- (ii) The amount of film used in the actual story on Spain.
- (iii) The number of items or stories in the whole newsreel issue with the position of the story on Spain in brackets. (See note below.)
- (iv) The amount of titles footage to the whole newsreel issue.
- (v) The amount of film used on all the stories in the issue.
- (vi) The amount of film used on the whole newsreel issue, i.e. a combined total of the titles footage and the stories footage.

N.B. In (iii), where a story on Spain occupies part of the Roving Camera Reports section of a newsreel, then there

is no individual titles footage, but the story is given a letter to signify its position within that section. Thus, 7(4b) means: that there are 7 stories in the whole of the newsreel issue; that the Roving Camera Reports section occupies the 4th position in the run of 7 stories; and that the story on Spain is the second story in the Roving Camera Reports section. Where it is noted that a story on Spain was "dropped for Dublin", this simply means that the story was not ready in time for the "first editions" of that issue to Dublin. The story may well have appeared in a later issue for that city.

GB Issue No.269, 27/7 /36. Spanish Revolution; Pictures of the fighting in Madrid. (Sent in advance to West End Hall.) 15; 116; 5(1); 116; 717; 833.

GB Issue No.270, 30/7/36. Spanish Revolution; Refugees depart on British ships, scenes in Madrid, Guadalajara and Guadarrama. 10; 156; 6(6); 106; 670; 776.

GB Issue No.271, 3/8/36. Roving Camera Reports: Civil War in Spain; Scenes at Guadarrama. (Civil War in Spain dropped for Dublin.) -; 25; 7(4b); 126; 612; 738.

GB Issue No.272, 6/8/36. Spanish Civil War 4th edition; Scenes of Rebels advancing on Madrid, Refugees at Gibraltar and Spanish ship at Southampton. (Spanish Civil War dropped for Dublin.) 15; 123; 8(8); 107; 706; 813.

GB Issue No.273, 10/8/36. Spanish Civil War 5th edition; Government troops go into action near Madrid. 9; 70; 5(3); 98; 717; 815.

GB Issue No.274, 13/8/36. The "Blonde Amazon"; Miss Phyllis Gwatkin Williams speaks to GB News about her experiences in the Spanish Civil War. 16; 230; 5(5); 94; 743; 837.

GB Issue No.276, 20/8/36. Spanish Civil War; Scenes in San Sebastian, Seville, Madrid. General Mola meets General Franco in Burgos. 15; 125; 4(1); 101; 699; 800.

GB Issue No.277, 24/8/36. Spanish Civil War 7th edition; Seville, Algeciras and Madrid. (No.2 item is President Roosevelt speaks for peace.) 15; 96; 8(1); 120; 658; 778.

GB Issue No.278, 27/8/36. Spanish Civil War 8th edition; Captain Juber with Government troops at Azaila. (Preceded by First British Ambulance leaves for Spain and followed by Wonderful Britain.) -; 82; 6(5); 94; 672; 766.

GB Issue No.280, 3/9/36. Rebels take outpost of hilltop near Burgos. Scenes at Irun, Saragossa and San Sebastian in Spain. 18; 100; 7(1); 130; 630; 760.

GB Issue No.282, 10/9/36. Spain, Irun in ruins after capture by rebels. 10; 53; 8(5); 123; 633; 756.

GB Issue No.283, 14/9/36. Roving Camera Reports: Spanish Rebels go into occupation of Huelva. -; 32; 9(5d); 129; 687; 816.

GB Issue No.284, 17/9/36. Spanish Civil War; Refugees depart. Rebels converge on Madrid. Toledo in ruins. (Replaced for Dublin.) 10; 69; 6(2); 107; 674; 781.

GB Issue No.285, 21/9/36. Irun in ruins. Rebel troops enter San Sebastian. (Scottish Ambulance Unit for Spain not used.) 13; 70; 10(2); 132; 722; 854.

GB Issue No.286, 24/9/36. Italian aircraft brought down in Spanish Civil War. Insurgents capture defending Government troops. (Hearst-Metrotone material. Replaced for Dublin.) 8; 57; 10(2); 127; 678; 805.

GB Issue No.287, 28/9/36. Ruins of the Alcazar. Senor Largo Caballero tours ruined area at Santa Cruz Convent. 8; 84; 12(6); 125; 674; 799.

GB Issue No.289, 5/10/36. Toledo relieved by Rebels. Generals Franco and Moscardo. 15; 147; 7(1); 108; 660; 768.

GB Issue No.295, 26/10/36. Rebel troops relieve Oviedo. -; 67; 8(4); 50; 695; 745.

GB Issue No.298, 5/11/36. Roving Camera Reports: Madrid entrenched awaits attack of the Insurgents. -; 32; 9(5e); 118; 644; 762.

GB Issue No.299, 9/11/36. The Fall of Madrid showing Rebels advancing a few miles out. (From Rebels' Library.) 6; 54; 7(3); 88; 664; 752.

GB Issue No.300, 12/11/36. Insurgents advance on Madrid while defences are strengthened. 7; 64; 5(2); 78; 707; 785.

GB Issue No.302, 19/11/36. Roving Camera Reports: Spanish Insurgents encircle and bomb Madrid. -; 78; 8(4d); 81; 736; 817.

GB Issue No.303, 23/11/36. Spanish Government ships leave Malaga. Also Government ships in action at Bilbao. 7; 55; 5(2); 72; 720; 797.

GB Issue No.307, 7/12/36. Madrid partially destroyed by Insurgent bombing. 6; 78; 9(8); 133; 621; 754.

GB Issue No.313, 28/12/36. Review of the Year: Foreign Affairs; Spanish Civil War. 7; 234; 6(5); 85; 873; 958.

GB Issue No.316, 7/1/37. Anglo-Italian Mediterranean Pact signed in Rome. -; 30; 11(6); 90; 663; 753.

GB Issue No.318, 14/1/37. Madrid buildings in ruins. Soldiers amuse themselves with fireworks. Evacuation goes on. -; 59; 6(4); 67; 693; 760.

GB Issue No.328, 18/2/37. Spanish Civil War drags on. Insurgents enter Malaga. (Followed by Britain Re-arms.) 7; 88; 5(4); 66; 710; 776.

GB Issue No.332, 4/3/37. Defence of Madrid still holds. (Followed by Llandoverly Castle mined off the coast of Spain.) 6; 54; 9(6); 78; 722; 800.

GB Issue No.339, 29/3/37. British Prisoners of War in Spain. 6; 48; 10(9); 98; 733; 831. (Followed by Interview in Spanish trenches and capture of village near Madrid. -; 66; 10(10).)

GB Issue No.350, 6/5/37. Ruins of Guernica after air-raid in Spanish Civil War. 5; 52; 9(2); 98; 760; 858.

GB Issue No.354, 20/5/37. Basque children evacuated from Bilbao while fighting continues. (Replaced for Manchester and Liverpool by Whitweek procession. Replaced for Glasgow by Church of Scotland.) 7; 102; 4(2); 59; 799; 858.

GB Issue No.356, 27/5/37. Fighting in Spain while Basque children are evacuated. 6; 34; 10(3); 89; 776; 865. (Followed by Basque children arrive in England from Spain. -; 66; 10(4).)

GB Issue No.358, 3/6/37. British Prisoners of War in Spain and subsequent arrival in England after release. 44; 105; 7(7); 114; 753; 867.

GB Issue No.359, 7/6/37. Roving Camera Reports: French commercial airliner brought down by Spanish Insurgent planes. -; 18; 9(5b); 89; 729; 818.

GB Issue No.361, 14/6/37. Roving Camera Reports: Dancing in Bilbao during Civil War. -; 32; 9(5c); 80; 711; 791.

GB Issue No.363, 21/6/37. Basque Iron Belt falls at Bilbao. 6; 48; 11(4); 88; 763; 851.

GB Issue No.364, 26/6/37. Insurgents enter Bilbao. 8; 136; 8(7); 96; 751; 847.

GB Issue No.368, 8/7/37. Refugee ship from Santander stopped by warship. 5; 180; 8(6); 81; 738; 819.

GB Issue No.376, 5/8/37. Roving Camera Reports: Fighting on the Madrid Front. -; 40; 10(5a); 98; 663; 761.

GB Issue No.389, 20/9/37. Spanish Destroyer. 7; 49; 10(7); 91; 711; 802.

GB Issue No.397, 18/10/37. Spanish Non-Intervention Committee meets in London. 8; 34; 8(1); 99; 707; 806. (Followed by General Franco reviews 35,000 people at Burgos. -; 27; 8(2). Followed by Comparisons in speech making by Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. -; 17; 8(3). Followed by Mr. Chamberlain speaks on Health. -; 121; 8(4).)

GB Issue No.400, 28/10/37. Spanish Insurgents enter Gijon. 7; 56; 8(2); 90; 719; 809.

GB Issue No.401, 1/11/37. Gijon refugees picked up by HMS Southampton. 8; 166; 9(8); 126; 624; 750.

GB Issue No.402, 4/11/37. Mussolini speaks on the 16th Anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome. 9; 58; 15(14); 109; 650; 759. (Followed by Sir Anthony Eden speaking with "We Will Not be Dictated To" superimposed. -; 16; 15(15).)

GB Issue No.417, 26/12/37. Review of the Year: Foreign Affairs; Spanish Civil War. 5; 279; 5(4); 102; 897; 999.

GB Issue No.419, 3/1/38. Spanish Civil War centres upon Teruel. 8; 61; 9(7); 106; 684; 790.

GB Issue No.423, 17/1/38. Snow in different parts of the world including Franco's troops on snow covered ground near Teruel. -; 30; 9(2b); 105; 693; 798.

GB Issue No.428, 3/2/38. Battle planes bring death in peace and in war including Wellington Bomber and Bomb victims of the Thorpeness. Funeral at Tarragona. -; 41; 7(1e); 96; 792; 888.

GB Issue No.442, 24/3/38. Roving Camera Reports: Barcelona in ruins after bombing. -; 32; 5(a); 94; 678; 772.

GB Issue No.444, 31/3/38. Insurgents continue to advance on the Aragon Front. 9; 72; 10(9); 112; 687; 799.

GB Issue No.450, 21/4/38. Anglo-Italian Pact signed in Rome. 7; 62; 8(5); 109; 716; 825.

GB Issue No.457, 16/5/38. The League discusses Abyssinia, Spain and China. 6; 56; 8(2); 104; 699; 803.

GB Issue No.516, 8/13/38. Madrid bombed with bread. 8; 56; 10(6); 98; 680; 778.

GB Issue No.517, 12/12/38. International Brigade returns from Spain. 9; 68; 5(1); 100; 667; 767. (Followed by

- Roosevelt at sick children's hospital. 8; 64; 5(2). And at the end of the release The Defence of France No.4. -; 337; 5(5).)
- GB Issue No.522, 29/12/38. Review of the Year: Foreign Affairs. 8; 253; 5(1); 101; 859; 960.
- GB Issue No.526, 12/1/39. Roving Camera Reports: International Brigade Memorial Service at Earl's Court. -; 30; 6(3c); 86; 770; 856. (Followed by Chamberlain leaves for Rome talks.)
- GB Issue No.529, 23/1/39. Franco's troops take Tarragona. 5; 55; 7(2); 106; 690; 796.
- GB Issue No.530, 26/1/39. Franco reaches Barcelona. 8; 55; 8(2); 107; 659; 766.
- GB Issue No.531, 30/1/39. The Fall of Barcelona. 6; 83; 7(7); 89; 672; 761.
- GB Issue No.532, 2/2/39. Franco's troops enter Barcelona. Spanish refugees at French frontier. 8; 145; 5(2); 79; 694; 773.
- GB Issue No.534, 9/2/39. Refugees retreat from Barcelona. 8; 91; 8(5); 100; 675; 775.
- GB Issue No.535, 13/2/39. Roving Camera Reports: Franco's troops reach the French frontier. -; 31; 6(5a); 106; 718; 824.
- GB Issue No.536, 16/2/39. Spanish troops repatriated to Franco. HMS Devonshire rescues refugees. 7; 55; 8(3); 98; 694; 782.
- GB Issue No.539, 27/2/39. Roving Camera Reports: General Franco reviews troops. Franco aboard warship. -; 40; 6(5a); 96; 714; 810.
- GB Issue No.540, 2/3/39. Review of the Spanish Civil War. 7; 199; 8(8); 97; 765; 862.
- GB Issue No.548, 30/3/39. Madrid surrenders. 7; 57; 5(1); 88. 656. (Followed by Marshall Petain at Burgos. -; 18; 5(1); Mussolini shouts "Woe to the Weak". -; 21; 5(1); The King of Italy speaks. -; 17; 5(1); Hitler goes to Memel. -; 28; 5(1); Viscount Gort leaves to inspect Maginot Line. -; 36; 5(1); Sir John Anderson speaks on need for ARP. -; 72; 5(1).)
- GB Issue No.549. 3/4/39. Franco troops enter Madrid. 16; 193; 6(1); 125; 689; 814.

(b) Gaumont Graphic

The list below cites a selection of the Gaumont Graphic issues relating to Spain during the years when the newsreel was in existence, i.e. from 1910 to 1933. It gives the issue number, date of release, library number and the title of the story.

GG Issue No.684, 8/10/17. (1768). Barcelona authorities prepare for trouble.

GG Issue No.1054, 21/4/21. (4663). Spanish troops encamped at Sidi Dais, Morocco.

GG Issue No.1099, 30/9/21. (5115). Spanish troops in Morocco.

GG Issue No.1304, 8/9/23. (7009). Revolution in Spain.

GG Issue No.2095, 20/5/31. (17231). Spain: New Republic.

(c) Universal News

The list below cites one of the Universal News issues relating to Spain in the years before the Spanish Civil War. It gives the issue number, date of release and the title of the story.

Universal News Issue No.443, 8/10/34. News in Brief: Spanish Riots.

(d) British Paramount News

The list below cites all the British Paramount News issues relating to the Spanish Civil War. It also cites a selection of the issues relating to Spain in the years before the Civil War, and a selection of Paramount's general European coverage. It gives the issue number, date of release, title of the story and a brief summary of the story relating to Spain. The figures which follow reveal the library number of the story and the number of the stories in the whole release, with the position of the story on Spain in brackets.

BP Issue No.14, 16/4/31. Nation votes for Republic on polling day as King Alfonso abdicates: Madrid. First pictures from Spain. 88.

BP Issue No.16, 23/4/31. Alfonso in England: London. King Alfonso arrives. First pictures. 99.

BP Issue No.481, 7/10/35. War. Italians invade Abyssinia. 4652.

BP Issue No.496, 28/11/35. Fall of Makale: First pictures of Italian entry into town. 4782.

BP Issue No.520, 20/2/36. Spain holds election: 3 killed, scores injured. After brisk voting scenes, polling gives parties of the left a clear majority. 4948; 7(3).

BP Issue No.540, 30/4/36. Fete Spanish President: Seville welcomes nation's new head. Senor Barrio accompanies President to bullfight. 5110.

BP Issue No.553, 15/6/36. Bees rout rheumatics: Madrid. Five stings and you're cured. Spanish professor demonstrates treatment which claims amazing results. 5219.

BP Issue No.568, 6/8/36. Spain. Latest war pictures: Government and rebel forces prepare for decisive battle. Fighting on all fronts of civil war. 5310; 3(3).

BP Issue No.569, 10/8/36. Spanish War still raging: Rebels bombard Toledo. Government rush 5 day recruits into front line to stem advance on Madrid. 5318; 5(4).

BP Issue No.571, 17/8/36. Madrid holds out: Spanish Civil War nears climax. 5351; 3(3).

BP Issue No.572, 20/8/36. Rebel attacks converge: Spain. Government armies menaced on three sides. Insurgents take Tolosa, only 15 miles from San Sebastian. 5355; 5(3).

BP Issue No.573, 24/8/36. Spanish War deadlock: Victory still eludes both armies. San Sebastian shelled. General Franco in Burgos. Government take Pina. 5359; 5(2).

BP Issue No.575, 31/8/36. Moors aid rebels: Spain. Coloured troops reinforce northern army. Graphic pictures of attacks near San Sebastian. 5371; 6(5).

BP Issue No.577, 7/9/36. Rebels take Irun: Spain. Terror struck inhabitants flee blazing city. M. Rosenberg, Soviet's first Ambassador to Spain, arrives in Madrid. 5385; 6(6).

BP Issue No.581, 21/9/36. Alcazar blown up: Toledo's historic citadel mined. Survivors of fortress garrison still hold out after 63 days siege. 5414; 5(4).

BP Issue No.582, 24/9/36. Alcazar mined. First pictures: British Paramount News brings to you the most dramatic war pictures ever taken. The blowing up of Toledo fortress. 5420; 5(5).

BP Issue No.585, 5/10/36. Alcazar relieved: First pictures

BP Issue No.613, 11/1/37. News Flashes From Everywhere: Santiago. Historic Spanish city inaugurates a Holy Year while Civil War continues. 5753; 5(3a).

BP Issue No.616, 21/1/37. U.S. Ban too late to catch Spanish cargo: New York. Spanish ship loaded with arms clears customs and races free as U.S. ban on export becomes law. 5786; 7(1).

BP Issue No.618, 28/1/37. Madrid raided as powers ban intervention: Madrid, Malaga and Oviedo. Germany, Italy and Russia agree with France and Britain to ban intervention. Whilst in Spain Madrid reels under worst air-raid yet. 5814; 6(6).

BP Issue No.625, 22/2/37. French navy stage battle off Riviera: Nice. Mediterranean squadron goes to battle practice as powers put non-intervention in Spain agreement into force. 5881; 5(1).

BP Issue No.626, 25/2/37. Six Power ban on Spanish Intervention: Non-Intervention Committee appoint 1,000 inspectors as cordon round Spain to stop arms and volunteers. 5893; 6(5).

BP Issue No.628, 4/3/37. British liner mined. Madrid defies Franco: Port Vendres. Mined Llandoverly Castle reaches harbour. Madrid. Government forces hold out against fierce attacks and aerial bombardment. 5916; 6(6).

BP Issue No.629, 8/3/37. Franco greets Hitler's envoy. Pact rumoured: Salamanca. Newly appointed German Ambassador is welcomed by insurgent leader in Spain. 5918; 6(1).

BP Issue No.630, 11/3/37. News Flashes From Everywhere: Off New York. Arms for Spain intercepted. 5928; 5(3a).

Library No.5946. Not issued. International Brigades in Spain.

Library No.5990. Not issued. Volunteers for Spain arrested by French boat.

BP Issue No.636, 1/4/37. Spain keeps Holy Week despite war: Seville. Elaborate procession marks Holy Week. Under Franco, populace revert to splendour of old times 5992; 6(1).

BP Issue No.650, 20/5/37. 6,000 children evacuated from stricken Bilbao: La Rochelle, France. First batch arrive in France. Humane work of Great Powers saves kiddies from horrors of siege and war. 6232; 3(2).

BP Issue No.652, 27/5/37. Basque children arrive in England. 6237; 4(1).

BP Issue No.660, 24/6/37. British Paramount News Special. Bilbao falls. First Pictures: Bilbao, Spain. Vivid pictures show final stages of attack and fall of beleaguered city as terrified refugees stream out. 6448; 4(4).

BP Issue No.672, 5/8/37. News Flashes From Everywhere: Near Marseilles. Spanish ships shelled by two unidentified submarines. 6575; 5(3b).

BP Issue No.681, 6/9/37. Ships bombed in Gijon air-raid reach Britain: Falmouth. Bombed Spanish destroyer and British Hilda Moller arrive for repairs as Cabinet decides to take action. 6678; 6(4).

BP Issue No.684, 16/9/37. Bombs enrage French as Piracy Conference sits: Paris. Bombs wreck headquarters of French industrial organisations. Nyon Anti-Piracy Conference plans Mediterranean patrols. 6703; 6(5).

BP Issue No.685, 20/9/37. Piracy patrol starts before Nyon ink dries: Sheerness. Nyon. Powers sign Nyon Mediterranean anti-submarine patrol agreement and Britain sends off more destroyers to do her bit. 6709; 8(4).

BP Issue No.693, 18/10/37. World fences for peace as Franco acts: Burgos. General Franco holds monster youth parade at his headquarters and assures world Spain will remain Spanish. 6795; 7(5). (Also The Prime Minister Explains: In his first talk since taking office Mr. Chamberlain outlines the ideals behind the National Fitness Campaign. 6794; 7(4).)

BP Issue No.696, 28/10/37. News Flashes From Everywhere: Gijon. Last Government stronghold in Northern Spain falls to Franco. 6846; 5(3c).

BP Issue No.714, 30/13/37. Review of the Year 1937. 7065.

BP Issue No.716, 6/1/38. 500,000 Spaniards locked in death fight for Teruel: Aragon. Is it the turning point? Both sides stake all in bloodiest battle of the Civil War. 7080; 5(2).

BP Issue No.719, 17/1/38. Rome bloc signs recognition of General Franco: Budapest. After diplomatic hunting party in the snow, Austria and Hungary get together and sign declaration at Italy's invitation. 7108; 6(1).

BP Issue No.722, 27/1/38. 138 Killed by Franco Planes' Lightning Raid: Barcelona. The raid which made Europe

gasp. 90 seconds of death and destruction. 7146; 7(6).

BP Issue No.730, 24/2/38. Mr. Attlee expresses the views of the opposition parties: Mr. Attlee gives his opinion on the resignation of Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, after disagreement with Mr. Chamberlain. 7230.

BP Issue No.738, 24/3/38. Franco push. End near?: Belchite. Insurgents drive through towards Barcelona. Government forces fell back before fiercest onslaught of the year. 7312; 5(1).

BP Issue No.740, 31/3/38. Barcelona faces defeat; Aragon. Franco thrusts towards key defences of Government stronghold. 7336, 6(6).

BP Issue No.742, 7/4/38. News in Flashes: Luchon. Spanish Refugees pour into France. 7354; 4(2c).

BP Issue No.743, 11/4/38. Lerida. Now victory?: Catalonia. Graphic pictures of final stages as Franco's forces race onwards with victory beckoning. 7369: 6(5).

BP Issue No.746, 21/4/38. Britain and Italy sign pact: Rome. Britain and Italy sign pact which removes all past causes of trouble and promises new era of peace for Europe. 7400; 6(2).

BP Issue No.760, 9/6/38. 400 killed in air-raid: Granollers. Franco planes driven off from Barcelona, rain death on open market town. 7545; 6(2).

BP Issue No.763, 20/6/38. The Fall of Castellon: Spain. Graphic pictures as Franco's men enter Government key town on Mediterranean after heavy fighting. 7571; 5(2).

BP Issue No.785, 5/9/38. Spain "swaps" prisoners: Hendaye. 100 war prisoners march into France in first exchange of war prisoners arranged by British Commission. 7777; 6(2).

BP Issue No.799, 24/10/38. Duce calls troops home: Naples. 10,000 troops return home after fighting in Spanish Insurgent Army. They are the first batch to be withdrawn under non-intervention agreement. 7884; 6(1).

BP Issue No.803, 7/11/38. Spanish "war" in North Sea: Cromer. Captain and survivors of Cantabria land after their ship was sunk by Franco Q-ship. 7916; 5(2).

BP Issue No.806, 17/11/38. News in Flashes: Pyrenees. French volunteers from Spain. 7940; 5(3a).

BP Issue No.807, 21/11/38. News in Flashes: Rome. Lord Perth and Count Ciano sign declaration which puts

- Anglo-Italian Pact into force. 7948; 5(3b).
- BP Issue No.808, 24/11/38. News in Flashes: Barcelona. International Brigade inspected by Premier Negrin before disbandment. 7955; 5(3c).
- BP Issue No.818, 29/12/38. Review of 1938. 8077.
- BP Issue No.823, 16/1/39. Franco's big thrust menaces Barcelona: Catalonia. Spectacular success attends insurgent offensive towards Spanish Government headquarters. 8121; 6(5). (Followed by Duce tells Premier Italy needs peace: Rome. Mr. Chamberlain and Foreign Minister Lord Halifax watch display after talks with Duce. 8122; 6(6).)
- BP Issue No.825, 23/1/39. Franco's onslaught nears Barcelona: Catalonia. Graphic pictures of Spanish Insurgent offensive which bids fair to end Civil War. 8152; 5(2).
- BP Issue No.828, 2/2/39. Starving refugees pour into France: French frontier. Dramatic pictures show terrible plight of Catalonian refugees as they escape through snow to safety. 8193; 6(6).
- BP Issue No.830, 9/2/39. France opens frontier to defeated army: Pyrenees. Catalan troops, fleeing before Franco, find safety by surrendering to French. 8205; 5(2).
- BP Issue No.831, 13/2/39. Franco troops reach French frontier: French frontier. Victorious troops reach French frontier as rest of Catalan army escapes into France. 8221; 8(8).
- BP Issue No.832, 16/2/39. France mops up before attacking Madrid: Figueras. Victorious troops take over burning town on heels of fleeing Government troops. 8232; 6(2).
- BP Issue No.833, 20/2/39. Artists aid refugees by painting hoardings: London. Well known artists turn London streets into studios for vivid publicity scheme for Spanish refugee fund. 8253; 6(2).
- BP Issue No.834, 23/2/39. Refugees set France difficult problem: Argeles. Thousands of destitute Spanish war refugees live in squalor shanty town on beach. 8271; 7(4).
- BP Issue No.835, 27/2/39. Victory crowns Franco. Recognition next?: Barcelona. As admiral, Franco reviews his fleet after triumphant entry into Barcelona. 8279; 6(2).
- BP Issue No.845, 3/4/39. Madrid welcomes end of long siege: Madrid. First authentic pictures of Franco's troops entering city after surrender. 8391; 6(2).

BP Issue No.858, 18/5/39. Franco's farewell to foreign pilots: Madrid. Spanish dictator reviews German and Italian pilots on eve of Madrid victory march. 8542; 7(1). (Also Madrid's famished children get relief: Madrid. 100,000 kiddies between ages of 3 and 10 have first meal under public relief system. 8548; 7(5).)

BP Issue No.860, 25/5/39. News in Flashes: Madrid. 150,000 troops march past Franco in Victory Parade. 8567; 4(3a).

BP Issue No.870, 29/6/39. News in Flashes: Spain. General Franco arrives to inspect naval dockyard. 8633; 5(3a).

BP Issue No.876, 20/7/39. News in Flashes: Spain. Count Ciano visits Franco. 8703; 5(3c).

BP Issue No.881, 8/8/39. News in Flashes: Madrid. France returns £8 million in gold to Franco. 8751; 5(3a).

BP Issue No.884, 17/8/39. News in Flashes: Madrid. Mass christening of 200 babies. 8773; 6(3c).

BP Issue No.888, 31/8/39. The Crisis Hour by Hour: Spain. U.S. Prisoners released. 8816; 3(3c).

(e) Post 1939 Paramount News

The list below cites a selection of the British Paramount News issues relating to Spain during the period from 1939 to the death of Paramount News in 1957.

BP Issue No.1585, April 1946. Jose Giral, Premier of exiled Spanish Government, holds press conference in London: Mayfair Hotel, London. With Duchess of Atholl. 15283.

BP Issue No.1909, June 1949. Franco tells Cortes Britain let him down: First pictures out of Spain for some time show General Franco addressing Cortes, in meeting in which he accused Britain of breaking faith. 17836.

BP Issue No.2129, July 1951. Franco ponders U.S. Air Bases. Gets 7,500,000 dollars: Madrid. American Foreign Relations Committee is received by General Franco and leaves hopeful of securing desired bases. 19698.

BP Issue No.2576, 7/11/55. These names make news: Madrid. Secretary Foster Dulles calls on General Franco. 23979.

(f) British Movietone News

The list below cites a selection of the British Movietone News issues relating to general European events in the years before 1939. It gives the issue number, date of release and the title of the appropriate story.

BMN Issue No.67, 18/9/30. The Foreign Secretary at Geneva; Mr. Henderson talks to you from the Home of the League of Nations.

BMN Issue No.110, 13/7/31. If the Nations of the World Could See and Speak to Each Other There Would Be No More War; Three Party Leaders urge World Disarmament from the same platform of the Albert Hall.

BMN Issue No.139, 4/2/32. Arthur Henderson presides in Geneva: Foreign Secretary of late Government voices his hopes of Disarmament Conference.

BMN Issue No.300, 7/3/35. Is there to be an armaments race?

(g) Pathé Gazette

PG Issue No.577, 3/7/19. Peace Day: The historic scene at Versailles.

PG Issue No.578, 7/7/19. The proclaiming of Peace.

(h) Other film material: 1936-1939 (Documentaries)

Spanish ABC: A film report of the work of the Spanish Ministry of Information.

Producer and commentary: Ivor Montagu.

Director and editor: Thorold Dickinson and Sidney Cole.

Photography: Arthur Graham and Alan Lawson.

Assistant editor: Philip Leacock.

Refugees in Catalonia: Made by Laya Films for the Commissariat de Propaganda, Generalitat di Catalunya.

The International Brigade: Made by Vera Elkan for the Progressive Film Institute.

Crime Against Madrid: Part I, Call to Arms; Produced by the CNT.

Schools in Catalonia.

International Brigade Empress Hall Rally.

Grimau Protest.

Blood Bank.

Save Spanish Children.

Spanish Earth

The War in Spain.

News from Spain.

(i) Post 1939 (Documentaries)

Granada, MyGranada: Produced by Roman Karmen.

N.B. All of the films in sections (h) and (i), with the exception of "Spanish Earth", are housed in the film archive of Educational and Television Films, 247a Upper Street, Highbury Corner, London N1. "Spanish Earth" is housed in The British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London.

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(e) Unpublished transcripts and surveys

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Donald Watt, "Historians and the camera", broadcast Wednesday November 18, 1970, B.B.C. Radio 3, 2050-2110.

Arthur Marwick, "Archive Film and the Study of War and Society", B.B.C.-Open University Television Programme for A301, War and Society.

Asa Briggs, "The B.B.C. and World War II (The Home Front)", B.B.C.-Open University Radio Programme for A301, War and Society.

(f) Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the following people:

E.A. Candy; Formerly cameraman with Gaumont British News, now General Manager of British Movietonews Ltd.

Roy Drew; Joined the Gaumont Company in 1929; chief editor with Gaumont British News until 1959; editor of "Look at Life" from 1959 to 1969. Now retired.

George Elvin; General Secretary of the Association of Cinematograph Technicians during the period 1936 to 1939; now President of the

Association of Ciematograph and
Television Technicians.

Leslie Mitchell; Announcer and news-reader for B.B.C.
Radio in 1934; Senior Announcer for
B.B.C. Television from 1936 to 1939;
Commentator for British Movietone News
from 1939 to 1947; Commentator for
British Movietone News from 1958 to the
present day.

Pat Wyand; Member of renowned "newsreel family"
(brother Paul and uncle Leslie were
both newsreel cameramen); joined the
sound staff of British Movietone in
1934; eventually became Chief of Sound;
now Assistant Manager of British
Movietone News Ltd.